



Leveraging
Better Outcomes
for Downtown

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Preface

For nearly 30 years, the Onondaga Citizens League has represented an outstanding example of citizen participation in public affairs. Founded in 1978, OCL is an independent and not-for-profit organization that encourages citizen education and involvement in public issues. The OCL's annual study on a topic of community-wide relevance culminates in a report designed to help citizens comprehend the issue and its implications, and give decision-makers recommendations for action.

We are pleased to note that "*Leveraging Better Outcomes for Downtown*" has already attracted the attention and support of city, county, and business leaders, and a collaborative implementation plan for many of the public policy recommendations is already being put into place. As an additional outcome of the study, OCL will present the first-ever Syracuse Downtown Living Tour in May 2007, to highlight the many creative housing options that exist, and are planned for, downtown.

This study is in part an outcome of the previous OCL report on strategic government consolidation. That analysis of how to address the fundamental problems of the region – loss of population, slow employment growth, and stagnant personal income – recommended an immediate and comprehensive focus on reinventing downtown as a magnet for the investment and creativity necessary in a technological economy, and a simultaneous focus on harnessing the growth potential of the nearby educational and medical institutions to accelerate the reinvention of the hub.

Recognition and appreciation are due to OCL Board members Joe Ash and Doug Sutherland, who as study co-chairs shaped and directed the efforts of the hard-working study committee. Special thanks are extended, as always, to the individual and corporate members of OCL who support the work of the League through their membership dues and financial contributions, and to University College of Syracuse University, which provides the administrative and organizational support without which the Citizens League could not function.

With fond remembrance and heartfelt gratitude for his devotion to citizen participation and civic education, we dedicate this report to OCL founder Levi L. Smith, who passed away on February 7, 2007. Lee's leadership and guidance of the League for over twenty years established OCL's reputation among government and community leaders and concerned citizens as a respected organization and valued community resource. Although he is much missed, his legacy continues through the work of the Citizens League.

Sandra Barrett
Executive Vice President
March 2007

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to the many individuals and organizations who contributed to the success of the study.

First and foremost we offer our admiration and appreciation of the Study Committee members themselves, each of whom made unique contributions that collectively were indispensable to the completion of the study – conducting research, arranging or hosting public sessions, recruiting panelists and experts, and bringing to bear their individual knowledge, expertise and insight to the deliberative process. Though diverse in background and outlook, committee members were driven by a common commitment to the well being of the community and a strong desire to find the proper role the downtown can play in the community’s future. They made the study a constantly stimulating and enriching experience for us.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the many panelists who met with the committee and the public throughout the study process. Without the willingness of these talented individuals to share their time, experience and advice with the Committee, a study like this would be impossible.

A special thanks to our writer, Carol Boll, who helped us tell clearly and, we believe, compellingly, what our eclectic committee had learned and concluded over many months of deliberations.

Colleen Karl-Howe at University College was indispensable to the study committee, arranging meetings, distributing materials, managing the OCL website, and generally supporting the study process.

Finally, as is the case with every OCL study, we relied heavily on the organizational skills, resourcefulness and dedication of Sandra Barrett, the League’s executive vice president. Beyond the critical administrative support and informational resources she provided, Sandra continually challenged us to dig a little deeper and to think both creatively and realistically about the issues at hand.

Joseph Ash and Doug Sutherland
Study Co-chairs

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Executive Summary

“More than any other place, downtown gives a community its collective identity and thus its pride. It is the keystone that keeps the other pieces of the city in place. Downtown is the heart and soul of the metropolis.” — From *Changing Places, Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl*, by Richard Moe and Carter Wilke

General Finding

Downtown Syracuse – Onondaga County’s downtown – has been underfunded and undervalued for far too long. The consequences of this disinvestment have accrued to the detriment of the city and the surrounding Central New York region. With a number of positive trends and promising developments hinting at the larger possibilities for downtown, we must seize the moment NOW to put into place the principles and policies that will sustain and accelerate the momentum.

While there have been a number of promising recent developments, including the AXA and Excellus commitments to remain downtown, progress on the convention center hotel, Hotel Syracuse redevelopment, and the Pioneer Companies/O’Brien & Gere headquarters, ***the community needs to have more ambitious goals for its downtown.*** From our research and conversations with key individuals from many sectors of the local economy, we believe there is the opportunity to attract extraordinary investment to downtown Syracuse over the next decade.

Overall Goals

The linchpin of the current opportunity is the growth outlook for the educational and medical institutions adjacent to downtown. The Connective Corridor provides the conceptual and physical framework for a collaborative effort that can meet the objectives of these institutions and transform the downtown into the thriving nucleus of a newly robust regional economy. We believe community leaders should aggressively seize the opportunity, establish a goal of ***\$1 billion dollars in new private and institutional investment*** downtown over the next 10 years, and put in motion a detailed urban design and implementation strategy to achieve the goal.

Substantial new investment – restoration of underutilized structures, smart infill of many open lots and redevelopment of obsolete properties – is necessary to

invigorate the region. The regenerative effect of such a substantial investment to both the city and the surrounding region would be immense.

We recognize the goal is aggressive, but we believe it is achievable. However, we know it will not happen without major changes in how we value downtown and how we approach economic development. We must invest our attention and invest public dollars wisely to create a place that will attract substantial private and institutional investment that creates the economic return – and the pride of place – that Central New York residents want.

The solutions are achievable. There are no silver bullets: We need processes and programs that leverage a sustained stream of private investment, not just intermittent stand-alone projects. Here is what can be accomplished in the next 10 years:

1. **Residential development.** We need 2,500 new and rehabilitated downtown residential units, including conventional apartments, loft apartments, condominiums and townhouses, to accomplish a goal of 4,000 new residents – students, young adults, empty nesters and active seniors – downtown. Privately commissioned market analysis has concluded that this is achievable if the right conditions are put in place.
2. **Commercial development.** Spur development of 2.5 million square feet of new and rehabilitated commercial/institutional space – and the employees and visitors it will house – beginning with harnessing the largely untapped energy that exists on University Hill and using that energy to create new synergies that attract compatible tax-paying commercial investment.
3. **Enhanced appearance of downtown.** We must complement new investment by simultaneously improving the appearance of key sectors of downtown. To compete and earn its fair share of the area’s future investment, the public sector must strategically invest in parks and public spaces, sidewalks, lighting, trees and landscaping, and comprehensive welcoming and coherent way-finding signage; and budget sufficient means to maintain these investments.

Public Policy Adjustments to Achieve the Goals

1. **Leverage public assets to lift a downtown, a city and a region.** Secure and strategically invest \$40 million downtown over the next several years to enhance the downtown and leverage the first components of the billion-dollar capital investment strategy:
 - a. **\$10 million for residential development.** This funding would leverage the next 1,000 additional residential units, at an average rate of \$10,000 per unit, although the actual amount applied in each situation would depend on the other funding available and the actual need demonstrated.
 - b. **\$10 million to begin infrastructure and public realm improvements.** It is time to reinvest in the downtown public realm. If the public sector is unwilling to invest in its core, why should we expect private investors to risk significant sums there? (We also see value in a \$5 million investment by the county in and around its facilities in the downtown.)
 - c. **\$20 million for an opportunity fund.** For acquisition and redevelopment of blighted structures, innovative parking solutions and development inducements.

We are calling for strategic public investments that will yield many multiples of private investment that would not otherwise take place. *Community leaders should ensure that each \$1 of public investment will result in the investment of at least \$10 in new private or institutional investment.*

Obtaining the necessary public funding will be a challenge. However, history shows that Syracuse and Central New York are generally successful in securing substantial resources when the purpose is sound and the reasons are compelling. Past examples include the Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative (\$46 million), the Inner Harbor development (\$20 million) and the Connective Corridor (\$10 million). Sources for this funding should include federal, state, county, and city funds, including perhaps a portion of the DestiNY settlement. Clearly, state funding, established to advance the new administration's goal of revitalizing Upstate cities, should be an important component of this investment in Central New York's future. In addition, the city, county and local private development organizations should aggressively seek corporate and foundation funding for innovative downtown projects that can serve as test cases or models for other places.

2. **Create and enforce a downtown master plan and design standards.** Every new investment in downtown must contribute to its vitality and walkability. Recognize the value of urban planning and design, and set and enforce standards that enhance the beauty and accessibility of the downtown experience.
3. **Adopt zero tolerance policy toward irresponsible ownership.** Through strict enforcement of regulations, tax seizures, and, where necessary, eminent domain condemnation of blighted property, the municipality needs to adopt a new, aggressive approach toward speculators and other disengaged owners of deteriorated property.
4. **Aggressively lobby for a meaningful New York State historic tax credit.** Historic structures are among our greatest assets, and it is often a struggle to develop their full economic value. As Providence, R.I. and St. Louis, Mo. demonstrate, major rehabilitations induced with an effective state historic tax credit of 30 percent, teamed with the existing federal historic tax credit program, can revive declining center cities.
5. **Establish a professionally managed municipal parking agency or authority.** Noone – downtown workers, residents, shoppers, or visitors – is served well by the current situation. A coordinated parking system would help to assess parking needs, optimize use of existing facilities, and ensure compliance with maintenance, safety and design standards. Holistic parking solutions that include strategic investments in attractively designed and structured parking facilities and a coordinated operations and management system can induce substantial new private downtown development.
6. **Establish an adequate annual landscape/maintenance fund for downtown.** Budget adequate funds to maintain capital investments. Good maintenance is an investment in the future. The city, the county and private downtown stakeholders need to find ways to enhance the maintenance pot.
7. **Undertake an aggressive marketing effort, and hire a director of downtown development.** For the downtown to succeed, we must first create an identity for our city center that can inspire civic pride in every resident of Onondaga County. Then we need a professional director of downtown development dedicated to marketing downtown and accountable for leading a team effort to recruit

new retailers and office tenants, residents, business and convention visitors, customers and investors.

8. **Build on the arts.** As successful cities have demonstrated, great arts and cultural venues can become the department stores for the 21st century, drawing thousands of visitors and valuable new business activity to the hub. For both economic development and civic reasons, the public and private sectors need to do a better job of supporting the arts downtown.

Implementation

Instituting these public-policy adjustments and achieving the 10-year goal will require a well thought out year-by-year implementation plan. We believe the recently formed Economic Development Leadership Team, composed of the mayor, the city council president, the county executive, the chair of the county legislature, and the leaders of the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Development Association, is well situated to marshal the resources at their collective disposal to collaborate on executing a plan they jointly develop.

Next Steps:

1. The Economic Development Leadership Team should immediately concur that *at this time the focus must be on downtown*, ratify these recommendations and agree to jointly spearhead the effort.
2. Speaking in unison, the Economic Development Leadership Team should engage the key leadership of the University Hill institutions in a series of collaboration conversations to flesh out the opportunities – near term, mid-term and years into the future.
3. The Economic Development Leadership Team should host a series of conversations with private-sector interests – developers, owners, tenants and residents – to identify additional collaborative opportunities to invest in and grow the community, and with the public and arts and not-for-profit interests to identify still more opportunities to invest in and grow the community.
4. The opportunities that come out of these sessions need to be clearly understood – what is achievable now and into the future, what impediments stand in the way, and how private, public, institutional and not-for-profit leaders can collaborate to get good things accomplished.
5. The process requires trained professional staff in municipal departments working with the stakeholders to put together a thoughtful urban design and development plan that advances projects that meet private, institutional, public and community objectives.
6. With a plan in hand, the Economic Development Leadership Team needs to team these immediately achievable opportunities with the public resources and investments necessary to commence the effort.
7. Even as these first opportunities are launched, the Economic Development Leadership Team should focus on what happens next. The goal is to establish positive momentum that can sustain us – the downtown, the city and the region – well into the future.

To sustain momentum and to build community awareness and understanding of these initiatives, we would invite the Economic Development Leadership Team to report on its progress at the first annual Downtown Summit in fall 2007.

We can accomplish great things. A billion dollars in revitalization and new investment downtown is possible over the next decade, but only if the key parties act with urgency, purpose, priority and resolve. Clearly, the opportunities are there. What is needed now is leadership that will seize these opportunities and collaborate on innovative solutions that will strengthen and enhance our community for decades to come.

Introduction

The urban centers of American lore evoke powerful images: We picture bustling sidewalks filled with people who are shopping, sight-seeing, conducting business, or heading to a show or museum. Streets are lined with distinctive shops, convenient services, restaurants, and cultural and historical attractions; and pedestrians go about their business along easily traversed and attractive corridors that interconnect the varied downtown neighborhoods and attractions and invite further exploration. The streets pulse with energy and vitality and radiate a sense of community. This is the hub – the center of commerce, of culture and of community life.

Unfortunately, that picture represents more wishful thinking than reality as Syracuse and so many other cities continue to suffer the effects of an “American dream” that over the last six decades has lured residents and businesses away from downtown neighborhoods and out to the wide-open space of the suburbs. Shopping malls and strip centers have replaced the once dominant downtown department stores, and local mom-and-pop shops have been supplanted by national chains that have thrived in suburban settings. Many office tenants followed the retail and residential flight and relocated to ubiquitous suburban office parks that offer cleanliness, relative safety and the convenience of free parking, but little character. Our hubs have fallen into decline, and the entire region suffers. The problem is evidenced by:

- **Shrinking tax base.** Measured in constant dollars, the assessed value of downtown property has declined from about \$1.5 billion in 1976 to about \$729 million today. The effect of this \$800-million disinvestment over the last 30 years puts unsustainable burdens upon schools, neighborhoods, businesses and residents.
- **A stagnant region.** The decline of downtown has also contributed to the flat-line demographics of the Central New York region and our struggle to remain competitive. Without a significant revival in its signature city, it will be difficult for the region to attract sufficient new business investment and attract and retain the young talent necessary to truly prosper in the years ahead.
- **Civic disengagement.** The decline of downtown has taken a significant toll on our community spirit as well. With the fading of downtown as the region’s traditional retail center, and the failure to

replace that void with another compelling identity, the city center has become irrelevant to large numbers of city, suburban and rural residents. As a result, Central New Yorkers have lost their “town square,” that public space that brings people together, creates identity, and fosters a larger sense of connectedness.

That’s the bad news.

The good news is that in cities across the country, the tide has begun to turn as increasing numbers of people – young professionals, baby boomers and empty nesters, in particular – are taking a second look at city living. Tired of the car-dependent lifestyle of suburbia, they’re beginning to see the advantages of a life that can afford them easy access to stores, restaurants, cultural attractions and entertainment, and a potentially thriving urban scene. They’re beginning to rethink the American dream and recraft it for a new era. And as public attitudes toward living downtown begin to change, so are the attitudes of investors, businesses and retailers, who are beginning to reevaluate the possibilities in the urban centers they left behind.

With the right leadership – visionaries committed not to re-creating the downtown of the past but re-imagining and developing it for the future – the city of Syracuse stands poised to gain from the growing shift in public attitudes toward urban living, including the new governor’s stated commitment to rebuilding the state’s downtowns and attracting new residents. Here are some of the tremendous assets that weigh in our favor:

- **Central location.** Situated literally at the crossroads of Upstate New York, Syracuse benefits from the easy access it affords to the Adirondacks, the Finger Lakes, Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands.
- **Eds and meds.** Syracuse is fortunate to be home to several institutions of higher learning and outstanding medical centers. Higher-education institutions like Syracuse University, Le Moyne College, SUNY-College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Onondaga Community College and SUNY-Upstate Medical University not only draw the kind of talented and creative individuals so critical to the new economy; they also are a source of valuable academic resources and bring a vibrancy, diversity and energy to community life. Health care institutions adjacent to downtown – SUNY Upstate, Crouse, the VA and St. Joseph’s

hospitals – serve as powerful economic engines that can help to drive nearby downtown revitalization efforts and are major assets in keeping a high percentage of workers in close proximity to the downtown business district. In fact, according to 1996 figures cited by Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution, 35 percent of jobs in metropolitan Syracuse were located within three miles of the central business district, significantly higher than both the national average (22 percent) and other upstate cities. In turn, a vibrant downtown is important to area colleges and universities because it broadens the learning environment beyond the campus, and a stimulating and stable community environment is critical to continuing to attract faculty and students. Syracuse University’s Connective Corridor project – “to create a center for the arts and culture by designing a landscape and transit system to link the people and activities of the University Hill and downtown Syracuse” – is just one example of the kinds of mutually beneficial initiatives that are possible through town-gown collaborations.

- **Arts and cultural attractions.** The city of Syracuse is blessed with a wide range of arts and cultural organizations, including a national symphony, opera company, performing arts centers, world-class art museum and a science center with an IMAX theater, most of them within close proximity of one another downtown. These assets, which have the capacity to draw visitors from the larger region and beyond, are prize assets for all in the community, city-dweller and suburbanite alike, enriching our quality of life in ways other cities our size can only envy.

- **Historic character.** The wealth of historic buildings and sites in downtown Syracuse provides a richness and authentic character that cannot be replicated by suburban development. Our historic buildings and two history museums foster a sense of identity and “place.” They also offer great potential for Syracuse to become an attractive destination for the increasing numbers of people interested in heritage tourism.

NOTE: When we use the term, “downtown,” in this report we are generally referring to the special assessment district portion of Syracuse bounded by Rtes 690 and 81 on the north and east, Adams Street on the south and Onondaga Creek on the west. However, some entities outside that boundary are organically part of the downtown. Think of Syracuse University’s Warehouse and the Redhouse, for example, located on the edge of the Armory Square district, but west of Onondaga Creek. We concluded that to attempt to specifically define the absolute boundary of downtown was too limiting and ultimately pointless conceptually.

Why Should We Care?

A lot of people don't recognize the tremendous value of a thriving downtown. Nor do they recognize the cost to us as a city and as a region when our downtown is allowed to deteriorate. But the unpleasant fact is, when the city's downtown suffers, all of us suffer. Downtown represents the economic, cultural and social core of the Central New York region, and a region cannot thrive without a healthy core. Whether we live in a neighboring county, the suburbs, or in the heart of Armory Square, the health and well-being of downtown Syracuse should be of critical importance to all of us.

A vibrant downtown, rich in the kind of cultural, retail, business and social amenities that ensure a high quality of life, is a city's – and, arguably, a region's – most potent asset. It is our “calling card.” It attracts employers looking for a promising site for their company. It attracts prospective workers and corporate officers to new and existing companies. It draws college and graduate students who want their higher-education experience to extend beyond the campus boundaries and into the local community. It boosts tourism and convention business, which in turn promises to spin off more tourism dollars for other sites throughout the region. It draws the kind of bright, creative talent that is so critically needed in the new knowledge-driven, global economy. And it helps us to retain our young people, who too often today are forced to relocate to cities that can offer them the promise of jobs, prosperity and a secure future. If we are to stop the brain drain in Central New York – if we are to become an importer of talent rather than an exporter of it – then we must revitalize our core.

Success builds on success, and a thriving economic center attracts even more economic development. That's particularly good news for city residents, all of whom hold a direct stake in the health of downtown. A downtown revitalization study conducted by Syracuse 20/20 a few years ago states that “In 1980, approximately 23.8 percent of the assessed value of all taxable city property was located within the traditional center city. In 2000, it had declined to 9.6 percent.” An economically thriving downtown means increased tax revenue generated by downtown properties and a lessening of the tax burden on other city neighborhoods. We estimate that if the aggregate value of downtown property had merely grown at the rate of inflation, local government would be realizing an additional \$28 million in revenue annually.

A healthy, revenue-generating downtown also provides an important contribution to the funding of essential services for those residents living in distressed neighborhoods of our city. And it means greater revenue for financially strapped city schools, which valiantly strive to meet the educational and social needs of all children in spite of inadequate facilities and supplies and shortages of personnel.

Beyond the needs of the city, the performance of a downtown can be seen as emblematic of a region's vitality. Anecdotal feedback from location consultants is that a troubled downtown can be a drawback to economic development for the wider region, and not just the city itself. As Eliot Spitzer said in a speech at Syracuse University during the gubernatorial campaign: “In a knowledge economy, cities are more important than ever. They are the irreplaceable economic engine. They are the capital of our intellectual and cultural life and serve as a magnet for the people, young and old, who bring vitality to a community. This state will not be successful in creating opportunities for its people if it allows its cities to fail.”

Benefits can't always be summed up in merely economic terms, however, and one of the most significant advantages of a thriving downtown is better measured on an emotional scale. The desire for a strong community gathering place goes to the heart of our quality of life in Central New York. After all, nothing brings out Central New York crowds and community “spirit” like the annual tree-lighting festival at Clinton Square and the St. Patrick's Parade – two events that hark back to an era when downtowns were the hub of our civic and social life and everybody was our neighbor. These are the kinds of events that build fond memories and strengthen and enhance the fabric of our entire Central New York community.

The suburbs and, to some extent, outlying regions are an outgrowth of the city's thriving past. But the city will always remain the heart of Central New York, and the continued success of the region requires that we do all we can to ensure its long-term health.

We acknowledge that the topic of revitalizing downtown Syracuse is far from new. It's been studied numerous times over the last decade, by civic groups and private consultants, and many of the same recommendations continue to emerge. Yet, to a distressing extent, the city and its fortunes continue to languish. In this document, we underscore many of the points that

have emerged repeatedly in previous studies as well as explore strategies other cities have used for their own successful turnarounds.

But above all else, this study is a call for leadership. We need leaders who have a vision – and the passion, courage and conviction necessary to help us realize that vision. We need leaders who recognize that “business as usual” is no longer an option and that bold steps and creative solutions are essential if we are to move forward.

We care deeply about the future of our region. And we believe the time for deliberation and study is over. We now look to our leaders for action.

Our Vision

When we picture a vibrant downtown Syracuse, we envision a place of excellence that enhances the region and enriches the quality of life for **all residents of Central New York**. Specifically, this is what we see:

- Our thriving “Main Street” inspires pride and draws visitors to the heart of the business district.
- Pedestrian-friendly, walkable downtown corridors, with pleasant, tree-lined sidewalks and attractive storefronts, provide easy linkages to adjacent neighborhoods and promote a sense of community and safety among downtown residents, workers and visitors.
- Downtown has a vibrant, diverse, highly regarded residential district, with more than 6,000 residents living in several distinct neighborhoods.
- Downtown is an economic powerhouse recognized regionally as a desirable business address.
- The city showcases the distinctive character of its downtown by valuing and preserving historic architecture and finding new uses for historic buildings.
- Downtown is a center for culture, commerce, intellect and community life, a gathering place for people of all ages and races.
- The community’s first-class educational and medical institutions continue to invest in downtown, and more and more of their students, faculty and employees come to live, learn, work and play downtown.
- Great shops, restaurants, hotels, cultural facilities, sports and entertainment venues, easily found with attractive and coherent signage, have transformed downtown into a vibrant, round-the-clock urban hub that continues to grow, adapt and thrive with the changing times.

Where Are We Today?

In an effort to gauge the economic health and overall well-being of downtown Syracuse today, we have examined the current demographic make-up of downtown residents and also constructed a portrait of downtown that highlights several measures of vitality: economic trends, downtown demographics, residents' needs, downtown development and residential living, retail and office markets, parking and access, arts and culture and tourism.

Through research, panel discussions, presentations by experts, and study sessions, we have evaluated where Syracuse currently stands in each of these areas and explored some of the qualities we believe could lead to positive outcomes.

Economic Trends

The benefits of a thriving downtown are manifold: growth in new and easily accessible jobs; greater tourism dollars for the city and the region; a powerful enticement for new employers, employees, students and residents; and, perhaps most significantly for city taxpayers, greater tax revenue. Unfortunately, over the last 30 years, our region has seen the other side of this coin.

In the mid 1950s, city and town property values grew at roughly the same rate. By the mid-'60s, the property value of towns outside the city began to spike upward and continued to climb while city values grew at a much lower rate and lately have remained flat. The full value of taxable property in the downtown special assessment district has remained relatively flat since the mid-1980s.

Measured in constant dollars, the assessed value of downtown property has declined by more than 50 percent, from about \$1.5 billion in 1976 to about \$729 million today. As late as 1980, downtown held about 24 percent of the city's assessed value, but by the year 2000, the number had declined to 9.6 percent. This disinvestment has been pervasive and affects all sectors of the city economy. The numbers speak to both the economic and social decline of the city, and the struggles of the entire Central New York region to stay competitive. Downtown's shrinking tax base has put unsustainable burdens upon schools, neighborhoods, social institutions, businesses and taxpayers. The property tax revenue impact alone of the decline in assessed value is estimated to be \$28 million annually. Substantial new investment over the next 10 years is

necessary to stem the city's decline and reinvigorate the Central New York region.

Despite these trends, evidence exists that a reversal of fortune for the downtown is achievable. A number of recent announcements provide a basis for optimism – the AXA and Excellus commitments to keep major operations downtown, progress on the convention center hotel, redevelopment of Hotel Syracuse, the Connective Corridor project, the proposed Pioneer companies/O'Brien & Gere facility near Armory Square. A bright spot of strategic proportions for the downtown's economy is the growth outlook for educational and medical institutions in close proximity to downtown. The potential mutual benefits from collaborative efforts related to this growth are considerable.

Downtown Demographics

The population of the city of Syracuse has been in a fairly steady decline since peaking in 1950. Between 1950 and 2000, the citywide population decreased by nearly 32 percent, from 220,583 to 149,722. Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution reports that during the 1990s, the Syracuse metro area lost 1.5 percent of its population; Onondaga County lost 2.3 percent; and the city of Syracuse lost more than 10 percent. He also reports that Syracuse saw a 28.7 percent loss of density (the ratio of population to urbanized land) from 1982 to 1997. Among upstate cities, he says, only Utica showed a greater loss. Following is a quick statistical look at downtown Syracuse based on 2000 U.S. census figures:

- The population of downtown Syracuse (tract 32) peaked in 1920 at about 13,000 and hit a low of 1,400 in 1970. By 2000, it had inched back up to 2,444.
- Of those living downtown, 73 percent live in households and 27 percent in group quarters, including 19 percent (475 individuals) in the Justice Center. Of those living in households: 81 percent are in nonfamily households (generally single persons); 60 percent have never married (primarily young adult students); 55 percent are males; and only 20 percent have lived in their current dwelling for at least five years.
- Rental units make up 98 percent of all downtown housing.
- Young adults constitute the largest group of downtown residents, with those between the ages of 20

and 34 representing 44 percent of all downtown residents. Those in the 35 to 54 age group account for another 30 percent. The median age of downtown residents is 31.5.

- Downtown residents are ethnically diverse: 50 percent white, 33 percent black, 15 percent Asian and 10 percent Hispanic.
- Among those ages 25 and older, 71 percent have a high school diploma or higher, and 18 percent have a college or professional degree. Of all individuals living in households downtown, 19.8 percent are adults attending college or medical school.
- Of those in the labor force, 49 percent work in management or professional capacities; 27 percent in government; and 21 percent in services.
- The average trip to work takes 16 minutes. Modes of transportation: 44 percent walk; 42 percent drive alone; and 9 percent take a bus or taxi. A total of 55.6 lack access to a car.

Residents' Needs

While downtown development is critical to establishing a strong residential community, the needs of those residents must be met if we are to sustain that community. Downtown living unquestionably offers distinct advantages. But are residents finding that downtown offers them all that they need once they are here? Are we providing the services and incentives necessary to create and sustain a thriving, long-term residential community? We asked a broad cross-section of residents to list what they like about living downtown as well as what they consider to be the greatest needs or problems. Here's what they told us:

Advantages

- Proximity to stores, restaurants, doctors
- Reliable bus service
- High-energy environment
- Farmer's market
- Convenience to symphony, theater and other cultural attractions and festivals
- Great social environment
- Ability to walk everywhere

Needs

- **A range of housing options**, from affordable apartments to high-end lofts and, importantly, new ownership options.
- **More retail and services**, including bookstores, upscale retail, a video store, 24-hour diner,

general-merchandise stores, fitness centers and dry cleaners, which become more viable as residential densities increase.

- **More convenient and accessible parking** that remains open and available evenings and weekends.
- **Extended shopping hours** for downtown businesses and retail stores.
- **More attractive streetscapes**, including more trees and park space and improved sidewalks.
- **Better security**, especially foot patrols and night patrols. Residents want to feel safe on downtown streets.
- **Better community services** to address the needs of the homeless and panhandlers.
- **Noise control**, a problem that becomes particularly troublesome when downtown bars close for the night.
- **Easier access to regional transportation services** and a more appealing image for local bus service.

Residents make it clear that a healthy, thriving downtown residential community depends not just on the development of available housing options; it also relies on many other essential elements – strong retail markets, arts and cultural offerings, restaurants, accessible parking and green space among them – that typically characterize a vibrant downtown district. A critical mass of residents is clearly the first essential piece, but other elements are essential and will become more achievable as the marketplace responds to these new opportunities.

Downtown Development and Residential Living

The importance of a thriving residential presence downtown cannot be overstated. Study after study has concluded that a significant increase in the downtown's residential population is required if revitalization is to succeed. Hyett Palma's 2001 Downtown Action Agenda for Syracuse lists downtown housing as the number-one priority issue for the city. Syracuse 20/20's report of several years ago flatly stated, "No plan to redevelop downtown will succeed without addressing the need for residential development."

In a talk at the Onondaga Citizens League's 2006 Community Leadership Conference, Bruce Katz, of the Brookings Institution, cited the need for 6,500 more downtown residents – 1 percent of the Syracuse metro-area population – to create an impact downtown. And in a nationwide study titled "Characteristics of

Successful Downtowns: Shared Attributes of Outstanding Small and Midsized Downtowns,” study author Gary Ferguson of Ithaca cites strong residential neighborhoods and thriving downtown housing development as two common attributes of successful downtowns.

Why is residential housing so critical to a downtown’s success?

- The availability of a mix of downtown housing options is important to attracting and retaining young people who want an urban living experience.
- Downtown residents create vitality. A thriving residential population in a downtown with mixed-use venues (retail, restaurants, entertainment, services) generates 24/7 pedestrian traffic and an urban energy that, in turn, attracts others to come downtown for shopping and entertainment.
- A critical mass of residents is necessary to entice retailers and service providers to locate downtown. The energy that comes from downtown residents and the commercial uses that follow them also plays a role in retaining current, and attracting new office tenants downtown. Bruce Katz states, “The critical massing of people would attract amenities that lure businesses and jobs for downtown and metro-area residents, shoppers and tourists and help stem the exodus of young workers. Appealing new housing with street-level cafes and shops would bring life and a virtuous cycle of growth to metropolitan hubs. Research has shown that the physical clustering of talented people is critical for economic growth.”
- Those who live and work downtown spend about four times as much money downtown as those who only work downtown. And these residents

St. Louis, MO: Historic Tax Credits Turn the Tide

In the late 1990s, St. Louis, Mo., was a city in search of a future. Its residents and businesses had long since moved to the suburbs. An estimated 15 million square feet of downtown commercial space sat empty, and the historic buildings for which the downtown was known were crumbling and either vacant or underused.

Over the last several years, however, prospects for the city’s downtown have brightened considerably. Development in the central business district has flourished, and new residents are snapping up downtown apartment units as fast as they are built. In 2005, the U.S. census reported St. Louis had a net population gain of 4,383 — the first gain the city has recorded since 1950.

Credit for much, if not most, of the turnaround is given to the Missouri State Historic Tax Credit, passed in 1998. The measure provides an investment tax credit of 25 percent of approved costs associated with qualified rehabilitation of historic structures. Combined with the 20 percent federal historic tax credit, the state credit has proved to be a powerful inducement for developers to undertake the rehabilitation of vacant or underused historic buildings. Typically, these historic tax credits are sold to investors as a way to raise the additional equity necessary for difficult rehabilitation projects.

Between 2000 and 2005, some 5 million square feet of the vacant or underused downtown commercial space has been rehabilitated and put back in service, most of it with the assistance of the historic tax credits. Much of the construction has focused on converting former warehouses into loft housing with first-floor retail space. According to a 2004 report cited in *The New York Times*, since 2000, a total of 36 historic buildings have reopened or are under reconstruction, adding 1,863 residential units to the downtown market. Another 1,050 units were planned for completion in 2005 and another 1,359 for 2006.

Every residential property developed since 2000 and projected through 2006 was a renovation of a historic building, most of them with substantial support from the state historic tax credit, according to the report.

According to figures from the Downtown St. Louis Partnership, a private group that promotes downtown development, about 10,000 people now live in downtown St. Louis. Of that number, nearly half — 4,644 — live in market-rate housing. Eighty-two percent of those residents hold college degrees, with 30 percent holding post-graduate degrees. These new residents have repopulated once-desolate sections of the downtown, bringing with them energy, vitality and enhanced buying power.

The historic tax credits spurred development of downtown housing, and this substantial growth in residential numbers downtown is now luring retailers, restaurateurs and office tenants back as well. A \$47 million restoration project completed last fall has converted the formerly vacant Old Post Office building into a mixed-use office and retail project and is fully leased. Sixty new retail establishments also have opened in the area. And St. Louis Centre, an enclosed urban shopping mall that was built in the 1980s but never caught on with shoppers, also is scheduled for redevelopment, this time into a mixed-use retail and condominium complex.

The Missouri State Historic Tax Credit has had a remarkable catalytic effect on the fortunes of downtown St. Louis. It turned St. Louis’ extensive inventory of vacant and underutilized historic property from an economic albatross into a powerful asset that is now leading the recovery of this once grand city. As conditions improve and demand grows, St. Louis will soon begin to exhaust its inventory of historic downtown property. Already many of the best rehabilitation candidates have been snapped up. But the good news is that with this revitalization, achievable rents have begun to rise, making it financially feasible to begin planning for new infill development on downtown’s other vacant and underutilized parcels.

tend to spend their dollars on evenings and weekends, which extends downtown's effective hours of operation.

While the growth of low-density suburban subdivisions has dominated the residential landscape for several decades – to the detriment of cities everywhere – recent indicators show that a counter trend has begun to emerge. In fact, in a growing number of large and small urban areas, an increasing number of new residents are reverse commuting – choosing to live in the city and travel to their job in the suburbs. We see the beginnings of that same trend in those thriving pockets of downtown Syracuse – Armory Square, Hanover Square and Franklin Square, for instance – where developers made high-quality residential space a significant part of their revitalization efforts.

Where do downtown residents come from? SUNY Upstate Medical University and Syracuse University account for a significant percentage of the tenants living in downtown high-rises like Madison and Jefferson towers as well as in Franklin Square. Recent trends also indicate that empty-nest baby boomers looking to move out of their larger suburban homes represent a growing potential market for downtown housing.

To date, the primary focus has been upon rental units, but developers are reporting customer interest in a wider range of housing options in downtown neighborhoods, including home ownership. The average income of downtown tenants is substantially above the median income for the metropolitan area as a whole. These tenants have significant purchasing power and present a ready-made pool of customers for condominiums, townhouses and single-family homes in the city. In turn, residents who own their own home bring stability, community engagement, and a long-term commitment to the well-being of city neighborhoods.

In its 2005 annual report, the Downtown Committee of Syracuse reported that the demand for market-rate housing in downtown exceeded supply, with developers reporting extensive waiting lists for their residential projects. Clearly, there is a substantial market for downtown residential housing, whether for empty-nest baby boomers, young singles, downtown workers or others seeking close access to the amenities a downtown offers.

Development Issues

If the market for downtown housing has such potential, why isn't there more development? What kind of problems do developers face in launching downtown

housing projects? And how do we move toward attracting the kind of expansive development projects that will attract that critical mass of residents necessary to jumpstart the revitalization process?

- The Central New York area enjoys relatively low market rates for housing (both rental and ownership) compared to more robust communities. This is among the greatest difficulties facing CNY developers, particularly those working downtown. While construction costs are essentially the same as they are in thriving cities, rental and sale prices for apartments and condominiums are substantially lower – great for consumers but difficult for those bringing innovative projects on line.
- A second factor lies in the higher costs of developing downtown. Experienced builders say that building a structure downtown costs approximately 1.4 times what it costs to build in the suburbs. The premium cost factors include higher land assembly costs, expensive high-rise building code requirements, employee parking and materials storage issues for subcontractors that are reflected in bid prices, to name a few. These factors create a significant disconnect between the cost of building downtown and the revenue that can be generated through rent or sale of the completed project.
- Land assembly for downtown development is generally complicated and frequently cost prohibitive. Typically, multiple parcels of property are necessary for large-scale projects. Property-owner holdouts – often absentee owners of blighted parcels who see a way to cash out at someone else's expense – are likely to emerge, creating costly delays or abandonment of the project.
- Developers also express frustration over the many bureaucratic delays that can occur with permitting and other required approvals. The process can be slow and complicated for even the most experienced development organizations. Developers need earlier, and more substantial, communication from the city on expectations and an expedited approval process on the local and state level. The city has undertaken initial steps to respond to this concern.

Private developers drive the process, but in successful downtowns, the public sector frequently plays an important role – by maintaining a high quality of life in the public areas and offering supportive public infrastructure investments, appropriate tax incentives, assistance in acquiring blighted properties, and a timely approval process, among other things.

Municipal management of the quality-of-life issues, including convenient parking options, maintenance and cleanliness of public spaces, perceptions of safety, public civility and the challenges of the homeless, and

the problem of blighted properties adjacent to potential development sites, needs to be addressed in order for downtown residential development to work.

Providence: A Rebirth

Providence, the capital and most populous city in the state of Rhode Island, once built its fortunes on its jewelry and textile industries. But like so many other cities in the post-industrial era, its economic fortunes had begun to wane in the 1950s, and the downtown fell into decline. The city's population, which totaled 248,674 in the 1950 census, fell to 156,804 by 1980.

By the mid-1970s, city leaders began to take steps toward a downtown revitalization effort, and the commitment to building and sustaining a thriving urban center continues today. As a result of its successful revitalization efforts over the last two decades, Providence enjoys a national reputation as a "renaissance city" and in 1994 was awarded the "Livable Cities" award by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. It serves as a showcase for arts and culture and features significant new construction as well as rehabilitated historic structures. The city's bold, creative steps toward downtown revitalization clearly have paid off, and in 2006, its tax base grew for the first time since the late 1940s.

Keys to the Rebirth

Over the last 25 years, Providence city leaders:

- Seized an opportunity when Amtrak in the 1980s moved rail lines and sidings that had separated the state capital from downtown. The removal freed some 70 acres of unsightly rail yards for development and led to creation of a Capital Center Project, which bridged the spatial gap between the State Capitol Building to the north and the downtown central business district to the south. The project also served as a guide for future state and private development. It led to construction of a new convention center and Marriott and Westin hotels, and restoration of the historic 1922 Biltmore hotel, the "Grande Dame of Providence," which, like the Hotel Syracuse, had closed its doors during the height of downtown's decline.

- Retained Andres Duany in 1993 to conduct a planning and urban design charette with local stakeholders to establish a master plan for the revitalization of the downtown (known as "Downcity"). The 1993 Downcity plan galvanized public opinion behind the notion that the city could pin part of its downtown development strategy on loft apartments, higher education, tourism and the arts while protecting its urban character.
- Created an arts and entertainment district as part of its 1993 Downcity Master Plan that was founded on the belief that a flourishing arts scene would spur economic development and tourism. In an effort to create a supportive environment for artists downtown, the city secured income tax and sales tax breaks for those artists living and working in the district.
- Valued and preserved its historic character and always ensured that revitalization was not achieved at the expense of its historic heritage. In 1984, the entire downtown was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Strong design standards elevated the quality of downtown architecture and the public realm.
- Pursued numerous collaborations with nearby educational institutions, including Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Johnson & Wales University. These institutions — sensing that their fortunes and those of the downtown were intertwined — relocated facilities and brought vitality and new investment to downtown. Many RISD graduates chose to stay in Providence, started to call Downcity "home" and fueled the emergence of an active Downcity arts scene. Johnson & Wales University, inspired by the 1993 Downcity charette, committed to an ambitious \$21-million Duany-inspired urban campus on what had been largely vacant downtown land. Through its highly regarded culinary school, Johnson & Wales provides talent for dozens of hip, new Downcity restaurants.

- Decided to relocate the aging I-195 away from downtown to reconnect the Jewelry District with Downcity, doubling the downtown land area and opening it to the harbor.
- Enhanced the public realm by uncovering two rivers that flowed through the city but lay nearly buried by highways and parking lots. Attractive bridges and river walks were constructed along the newly exposed waterfront, and the city developed a major urban park space known as Waterplace. The waterfront park hosts free public performances throughout the year and a special annual WaterFire event that draws tens of thousands of residents and visitors to downtown.

Both the public and private realms played important roles in the city's rebirth. The Capital Center Project, in particular, attracted the interest of the Syracuse-based Pyramid Companies and led to the development of a \$500 million urban mall known as Providence Place. The mall, whose sophisticated design led Duany to call it the "best urban mall in America," is connected via skyway to the Rhode Island Convention Center and the Westin Hotel. It also features streetside restaurants and an entertainment level with an IMAX theater. With Providence Place, the convention center and the new and restored hotels, Downcity Providence has reinvented itself as a leading east coast convention and tourism destination.

The city revitalization effort also received significant support from the state in the form of a 30 percent state historic tax credit, enacted in 2002, that unleashed some \$400 million in historic redevelopment in the city. An independent audit commissioned by Smart Growth Rhode Island reported that by September of 2004, the state's credits of \$145.7 million had leveraged 111 projects that created \$795.25 million in economic activity cross the state, \$319 million (65.8 percent) of which occurred in Providence. Each \$1 of state credits leveraged \$5.47 of private economic output.

Other Findings

- **Developers welcome clear and explicit design guidelines and a predictable planning process.** Developers, businesses and residents also welcome a predictable investment environment: regulations and enforcement that apply to all properties to create a high quality, identifiable place.
- **Public-private partnership is crucial.** Public incentives are a critical urban revitalization tool, and without them, development in downtown would languish. As a transitional mechanism, they help to fill the gap between the cost of development downtown and the return in market-rate rental income. Public monies “prime the pump” in building the value of downtown while also raising the value of the entire community and region. As development reaches a critical mass and the value of the downtown setting grows, incentives are no longer necessary because market-rate rents go up. In other words, “Good things generate more good things.”
- **Incentives are available, but are they effective?** Incentives currently available to developers include Empire Zone tax credits, Federal Employment Zone credits, state brownfield tax credits (available for remediation and redevelopment of

Franklin Square

In late 1987, The Pyramid Companies approached the City of Syracuse with a 700-acre mixed-use redevelopment plan for Syracuse’s blighted lake-front district. Known as “Oil City” due to the dominant presence of about 100 large oil storage tanks, the district was a poster child for urban decay and environmental degradation. The original anchoring elements of the plan included a super-regional mall facility, later to become Carousel Center, at the north end of the 700-acre tract, and rehabilitation of a largely abandoned cluster of historically significant early 20th Century brick factory buildings to the south for commercial and residential use. That largely abandoned factory district was to become Franklin Square.

The area that was to be reinvented as Franklin Square was a desolate place. Public infrastructure was badly eroded; most of the early 20th Century factory buildings were not only vacant, but in poor physical condition due to decades of neglect. With little tax revenue being generated from the area, the City’s attitude toward the proposed development project was, “Why not?”

Franklin Square shared three key characteristics with Armory Square, which was undergoing its own revitalization not far away (as described elsewhere in this report):

- historic architecture that was empty, dilapidated and/or marginally utilized,
- little or no market interest in the area, and
- natural and physical boundaries that helped define the district.

In Franklin Square, developers believed that they had to comprehensively redevelop the entire neighborhood, rather than approach the project just one building at a time, in order to convince a skeptical marketplace that this was a viable address. A critical mass of early development was necessary to build market confidence and to create the momentum necessary to encourage later tenant commitments and investments by others.

An urban masterplan was prepared that established the goals and parameters of the project. Design standards were also put in place and a private-public partnership was crafted by the Young administration and the Pyramid Companies to spur the project forward. Without the assurances each side granted the other, the Franklin Square redevelopment would not have occurred. Between 1988 and 1992, about \$80 million in private capital and \$12 million in public investment went into the project. Using an approach similar to tax-increment financing, Pyramid advanced the \$12 million for public infrastructure improvements and was repaid several years later with PILOT revenues from Carousel Center and early Franklin Square projects. Public realm investments of high aesthetic quality were critical to the early and lasting success of the development.

The Pyramid Companies’ initial investments in Bridgewater Place, Plum Court, Mission Landing and One Franklin Square generated a sense of momentum in the area that inspired a wide variety of others to follow suit. Pioneer Development Company, for example, built two new office buildings — one of which attracted Unity Mutual

from the suburbs - and rehabilitated a third former factory into Class “A” offices. Several existing enterprises - the Borden Research Center, Burns Brothers and Roman’s Tavern — saw the value that was being created and made substantial investments in their facilities. Altogether, some 18 separate projects in Franklin Square produced over 650,000 square feet of commercial space and added some 330 apartments and condominiums to downtown.

The City’s willingness to condemn blighted property for private redevelopment also played an important role. Eminent domain proved necessary in certain cases to eliminate some dilapidated eyesores that discouraged new investment, and to establish a fair value for the acquisition of blighted parcels owned by profiteering holdouts that threatened the viability of the project.

Franklin Square and Armory Square are among the most significant urban redevelopment projects to emerge in upstate New York in the mid to late 1980’s. They each offer valuable lessons on how innovative private/public partnerships can overcome hurdles and achieve valuable, high quality, neighborhood-building investment in the urban core.

For the downtown to advance, the community needs to get past the more recent notion that public investments, incentives and inducements for private redevelopment are bad public policy. When these tools are applied judiciously and creatively, they can leverage substantial multiples of private investment that would not otherwise take place.

contaminated properties) and federal and state historic tax credits. Experience tells us that some of these programs are effective but that others should be retooled. For example, the Federal Empowerment Zone has not lived up to its advance

billing in any of the communities across the nation where it is applicable. The weaknesses within the NYS Empire Zone program have been well documented by the Post-Standard and others. The recently enacted New York state historic tax credit is a pale imitation of the highly successful historic tax credit programs in Rhode Island, Missouri, Maryland and North Carolina. With a new emphasis at the state level on stabilizing and rebuilding distressed cities across upstate New York, this is the time to fix identified flaws in the incentive package while looking to other communities that are “getting it right” for fresh ideas.

- **Public incentives are NOT corporate welfare.** This common public perception may be the single most difficult stumbling block facing those public officials who maintain a sincere commitment to downtown revitalization. Too often, public incentives are viewed as nothing more than a diversion of limited public funds away from those who truly need help in favor of providing unnecessary enticements to wealthy developers. They often misunderstand the economic necessity for such incentives and the long-term community payback that comes from thoughtful and strategic public investments that spur productive downtown development. In healthy cities, downtowns generally carry the largest share of the municipal tax burden. In Syracuse, our downtown tax base has declined precipitously through lack of private and public investment. The tax burden has shifted to other city neighborhoods, to their detriment.
- **Public investment sends a powerful message.** If the community is to convince developers to invest in downtown, then the community itself must show its willingness to invest. Well-maintained, attractive streetscapes, parks, public buildings and walkways encourage existing downtown property-owners to better maintain their own properties, and it sends a signal to prospective developers that the downtown is worth their investment. One notable local example of this dynamic: In Franklin Square, some \$12 million in public investment helped leverage more than \$100 million in private development activity.

- **Condemnation can be a powerful economic tool.** If the city needs a building and can't reach agreement on fair market value, it may acquire it through condemnation. This method for acquiring properties can be a critical tool for spurring key development efforts, particularly in the case of vacant and/or blighted properties that diminish the value of neighboring properties, but it must be used judiciously after careful discussion and public awareness.
- **Connections with the hill.** The city of Syracuse has tremendous assets in our educational and medical institutions. Syracuse University, SUNY ESF, SUNY Upstate Medical University, and the VA, Crouse and St. Joseph's hospitals are powerful economic engines in their own right and, because of their close proximity to the central business district, create the potential for complementary economic activity downtown. Unfortunately, the I-81 corridor virtually cuts off those assets from the central business district. While initiatives like the Connective Corridor can help mitigate that barrier, the city's economic fortunes would be well served if city leaders proactively sought to develop other collaborative, mutually beneficial initiatives.

Office Markets

Overall, Syracuse's downtown office markets – at least those occupying Class A (top-quality rental space) buildings – have a high occupancy rate. But because of flat demographics – little overall growth – there is very little new demand; and rental rates have remained essentially unchanged since 1990 before adjusting for inflation. After factoring in inflation, they reflect a 40 percent to 50 percent real decline since 1990. Not surprisingly, the last major office building was built 16 years ago.

In addition to the problem of stagnant rental rates, downtown suffers from a glut of run-down Class C office space that sits empty or largely vacant. These buildings require significant investment to make them habitable, and weak demand for additional space makes such investment unlikely. Unfortunately, these buildings project a bad impression of downtown, detract from other nearby properties and, in some cases, drive other tenants away. As cities across the country have discovered, many of these antiquated Class C office buildings are, in fact, better candidates for residential conversions than for continued office use.

Downtown office markets, like the retail markets, are victims of the sprawl that has driven so much of down-

town's traditional assets – shops, offices, residents – to outlying areas. When residents fled to the suburbs, businesses followed, and suburban office parks began to proliferate. Such office parks also could be developed more quickly and with fewer delays than similar development projects downtown, and employee parking is not an issue as it is for downtown office tenants.

In spite of certain advantages enjoyed by suburban office parks, there are other advantages enjoyed by attractive, vital and well-managed downtown districts. The success of Franklin Square in bringing suburban firms back to Syracuse with the appeal of historic architecture and attractive parks and well-maintained public spaces is particularly instructive. So too is the recently announced interest of the engineering firm O'Brien & Gere in relocating to a proposed mixed-use development adjacent to the vital Armory Square district and SU's recent investment in the Warehouse. As one office broker quipped, today's new tenants may prefer downtown's restaurants to the picnic tables behind suburban office buildings. If the right opportunities exist, these potential tenants may find that the downtown setting better meets their needs.

If downtown Syracuse can provide an attractive environment with desirable rental space, continue to streamline the development process for those who want to develop new office space, and reverse its flat demographics by boosting its residential population, the renewed demand among business owners seeking downtown office space is likely to be substantial.

Retail Markets

Perhaps the most public face of any city, a downtown's shopping district, fairly or unfairly, may be the single most important factor in the minds of the public when gauging a city's vitality. Streets lined with attractive shops doing brisk business give us a reason to come downtown beyond work. And the more pedestrian traffic the shops generate, the safer people feel and the greater the sense of street energy. For many, if not most, of us, the retail markets are at the heart of a lively downtown experience.

Over the last two decades, Syracuse, along with countless other cities across the country, has suffered a steady decline in retail and no longer functions as the central shopping district that it once did. The emergence of shopping malls, the desire for free, easily accessible parking, and general changes in retail have squeezed out the small- and middle-market stores that once accounted for much of the downtown retail market. The stores that remain downtown today are

all local and include specialty and convenience stores (one-price shops or drugstores, for instance) as well as some Internet-based stores that do their primary business online. Salina Street, in particular, is considered a key retail area in need of revitalization.

The traditional downtown of the past may be just that – a thing of the past. For that reason, we focused less on what went wrong with the downtown retail market and more on what qualities are needed now to establish a new, thriving retail environment of a kind that exists in successful cities elsewhere, and indeed in portions of our downtown already. Our downtown already has some key features that experts identify as important to the success of downtown retail – “traffic generators” such as museums and festivals and an active entertainment sector. What are some other features that would support a strong, healthy downtown retail district? Our findings revealed the following:

- **Great shopping districts don't just happen.** Retailers need a reason to move downtown. When they are convinced there is a strong market for their goods and services, they will return. Past experience shows that wherever residential development has taken place, retail has followed.
- **Successful downtowns capitalize on their assets.** When downtown retail includes unique shops that offer customers the kind of goods they cannot find elsewhere, those customers have no choice but to come downtown to shop.
- **Historic buildings add to a city's charm and uniqueness.** Highlighting the historic qualities of a city's downtown district capitalizes on its uniqueness and creates an environment that cannot be duplicated by suburban shopping malls.
- **First-floor retail is vital.** Street-level stores create street appeal, pedestrian traffic, a sense of energy, and the necessary “eyes on the street” that pedestrians need to feel safe day or night.
- **If safety is perceived to be a problem, it IS a problem.** And that becomes a major issue in attracting customers downtown to shop. Attractive, well-lit streets and first-floor storefronts are important factors in reassuring pedestrians of the safety of their surroundings.
- **Mixed-use development creates a thriving community.** Downtown neighborhoods that combine residential, retail, recreational and entertainment venues create a lively, functional 24/7 environment as opposed to just 9-to-5 traffic.

Armory Square: A Syracuse Success Story

Three decades ago, Armory Square was a neglected pocket of downtown real estate marred by empty warehouses, rundown 19th century buildings and a handful of declining businesses. Its heyday as a thriving commercial and industrial district built around the convergence of east-west/north-south railroad lines came to an end when the railroads moved out in the 1930s. By the 1970s, few people, including city leaders, saw much potential for reviving its fortunes.

Yet today, Armory Square is one of downtown's busiest and most attractive neighborhoods. Its streets pulse with activity as residents and visitors flock to nearby restaurants, clubs, specialty shops, and the Museum of Science and Technology that occupies the original armory. A district once written off as unsalvageable now stands as one of New York state's finest examples of successful urban revitalization.

What fueled the transformation? Several individuals heavily involved in the rebirth cite two key factors they believe made all the difference: 1) a clear vision of what the neighborhood could be, and 2) people who shared that vision and worked to bring it to fruition.

"We had a vision, and we did everything we could ourselves," says Lyn Simmer, an artist, former Armory Square retailer, and one of the neighborhood's first "pioneers." "And that included hours and hours of volunteer effort both in conceiving of and programming events in Armory Square and meeting with elected officials to lobby for those issues that we could not do ourselves."

George Curry and Bob Doucette were among the first developers to recognize the neighborhood's potential for revitalization in the late 1970s. "We had no money and no experience," says Curry, "but we had a great idea." When the two decided to purchase a building for mixed-use development, they sought to create an "urban experience" they felt was missing in Syracuse. "The area was ripe for our idea and belief that there were people in

Syracuse who would live downtown if an exciting opportunity was offered — thus creating the beginning of a 24-hour downtown."

Following are some of the factors that Curry, Doucette, Simmer and Joe Mareane, then-director of development for the city, cite as important to the Armory Square rebirth.

- **The people led and the city followed.** While the city, under Mayor Tom Young, supported the revitalization effort, the artists, merchants and developers who first saw the district's potential as a place to live and do business clearly drove the project. One of the city's greatest contributions, says Mareane, was "to avoid smothering what was emerging in Armory Square by creating elaborate public incentive/assistance programs that would have brought lots of rules, regulations, and handcuffs that could well have stifled momentum."
- **Housing was key.** "We had to fight a lot of preconceived prejudices about downtown," says Simmer. The inclusion of housing in the revitalization plan "was such a no-brainer for us, but many thought it was the wackiest idea of the late 20th century." Neighborhood housing fostered a lively, 24-hour atmosphere, and as a result, "It felt safer to be out late at night where people lived, and a wider variety of businesses could be sustained."
- **Mixed-use design generated activity.** The mix of housing, entertainment, restaurants, offices and services within the same neighborhood generated round-the-clock pedestrian activity. First-floor space was dedicated to retail, and upper levels to offices, services and housing.
- **Historic character was an asset.** The architectural richness of the neighborhood's buildings was what first attracted Curry and Doucette to the neighborhood, and Mareane credits them with demonstrating "the economic feasibility and market appeal of full-scale renovations of existing buildings in Armory Square — paving the way for more established/conservative developers and business people." The Down-

town Committee funded the group's application for historic district status, and that designation then enabled developers to qualify for income tax credits. New construction was designed to blend in with the area's existing historic architecture.

- **Economic incentives fueled development.** Incentives such as property tax abatements and utility discounts were derived from the area's designation as an Economic Development Zone. The city also extended small dollar loans to businesses that typically did not receive economic development assistance.
- **City stepped in.** In addition to offering economic incentives, the city 1) seized the critically situated, tax-delinquent Hogan Block building to free it up for developers — a move that generated some controversy but sent an important message that the city supported revitalization efforts, and 2) assembled an Armory Square Task Force and implemented its recommendation to create a unified streetscape design, developing green spaces and installing sidewalks and historic lighting. It also appointed a full-time liaison to work with the Armory Square merchants.

While the Armory Square experience offers instructive points for future successes, more than anything it underscores the importance of a shared vision, receptive city leadership, and the power of creative individuals to spark change. "What happened at Armory Square was not a plan," says Curry. "It was a group of very different individuals who somehow got together in this physical place. It was individual entrepreneurs who had this belief and commitment to an idea — to make a downtown neighborhood a 24-hour place, where people could live, work, eat and enjoy entertainment."

"The people were the most important part of determining the early direction of the effort," says Simmer. "I don't know how you re-create that. It certainly can't be imposed from the outside, but has to evolve from within. Armory Square's revival had a unique personality because of the unique people who gave so much to make it happen."

Round-the-clock usage also reinforces a sense of safety among pedestrians.

- **Connectivity is important.** Customers are more inclined to come downtown when they can make numerous stops at a variety of retail shops with as little fuss as possible. Routes between various retail and/or other attractions must be well marked and easily accessible.
- **National and regional retailers generate confidence among other potential retailers.** While local retail is likely to always dominate downtown, successfully attracting big-name retailers can go far in enticing other retailers to move back downtown. Cities that have been successful in their revitalization efforts recruit on the local, regional and national levels.
- **Last but not least, Salina Street is key.** Every past study of the downtown has pinpointed the redevelopment of its core blocks as pivotal to the future of downtown. They are the heart of the downtown business district – our “Main Street” – and they contribute significantly to visitors’ perceptions of downtown life.

Arts and Culture

Downtown’s cultural assets are vital components of the reinvention of downtown as a creative center of activity, a community gathering place, and an economic development tool. Theaters, concert halls, festivals, galleries, museums and public art reflect the vibrancy of the community. Cities across the country have hinged much of their downtown revitalization efforts on the development or enhancement of a downtown arts scene as economic development experts see arts and culture as the “department stores” – or new anchors – of the 21st century.

In Seattle, for example, between the mid-’80s and the mid-’90s, the city, state and private sector invested a total of \$240 million in flagship cultural facilities at the heart of the city, according to a report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. As a result of that investment, the facilities draw 10,000 people per night to downtown, where they generate additional business for restaurants, shops and parking facilities. Collectively, the arts in Seattle have generated more than \$150 million annually in economic activity. Other cities, including Pittsburgh, Austin, Minneapolis, and Charleston, SC, have found investment in arts and cultural attractions and events key to boosting the appeal of their downtowns and their attractiveness as tourist destinations.

Why are art and cultural institutions so important? Because they enrich the entire region’s quality of life. They create vibrant public spaces, serve as potent traffic generators, foster a sense of community, and help to build and sustain a positive public image for the city, the county and even the region. They are a continuing reason for many suburban residents to visit downtown and a powerful asset for attracting commerce, corporate investment, students, workers and tourists to Central New York. For instance, the Everson reports that at least one quarter of its visitors comes from out of state. As institutions like the Everson bring people to downtown Syracuse, they foster familiarity with the downtown and promote spin-off business for nearby shops, restaurants, cafes and hotels, as well as for county and regional businesses and attractions. They also spur the development of other downtown businesses, further enhancing property values and tax revenue for the city.

Arts and cultural institutions are a particularly powerful draw for the highly desirable knowledge workers who are so essential to the new economy. According to Richard Florida, of Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, these creative, intellectual workers value “quality of place” above nearly all other factors – including job market conditions – in choosing where to live. The arts are a vital ingredient to any thriving community; and they are good enough reason for all of us – regardless of whether we live in the city, in a suburb or in an outlying village – to care deeply about the future of our downtown.

Syracuse is richly endowed with arts and cultural organizations, with a partial list including a national symphony, professional theaters, an opera company, an internationally recognized museum of art, a grand movie palace and a Bristol IMAX theater. Several of these attractions are located within walking distance of one another – also an asset. And initiatives like the city’s Cultural District and the Connective Corridor project have the potential to further develop the city’s cultural assets and establish even greater access among them through a coordinated transit system. Art in public places is also an important aspect of the city’s cultural life. The 40 Below Public Arts Task Force now has several public arts projects in the works, and, recognizing the importance of the arts to economic development, the city has assigned a staff person part-time to help coordinate the technical and logistical aspects of public arts installations.

Despite the variety of cultural offerings centered in downtown and the continuing county financial support

for the arts, however, overall local public funding for arts organizations has decreased over the last 15 years, creating operational challenges for all downtown arts groups. Major cultural venues also face ongoing capital needs in their physical plants, which should be considered part of the vital infrastructure of an attractive and creative city.

But the power of the arts goes beyond the institutions themselves. Cities around the country have discovered that artists themselves can be a powerful tool for spurring economic revitalization. That fact was borne out locally two decades ago with the dramatic transformation of Armory Square – a turnaround initiated by, and largely credited to, the visionaries and artists who decided to stake a claim on what at the time was a dilapidated corner of downtown and inject new life and creative energy into it.

Unfortunately, as the success of Armory Square grew, the artists who contributed to the transformation found themselves priced out of the neighborhood. Efforts to attract and sustain a thriving creative community, such as initiatives to create an artists' "Warehouse District" west of Armory Square and plans to use the arts to market Syracuse on a national basis, bode well for downtown .

Downtown Festivals

Downtown festivals are another way of enlivening a city's cultural life, and Syracuse scores well in this area as it strives to build a reputation as a premier festival city. These events enrich the quality of life for residents of the area, attract visitors to the city, and draw positive national attention as well. Cultural and music festivals promote awareness of the downtown district, convey a sense of identity and generate a street vitality that draws others downtown.

One challenge: the frequent disconnect between festivals and downtown establishments. If festivals are to help stimulate revitalization, festival organizers and business leaders must work collaboratively on marketing initiatives to encourage festival-goers to "discover" and patronize downtown businesses and cultural organizations. One successful example: the CNY Jazz Arts Foundation co-marketed a "pub crawl" as part of its festivities, booking the bands that performed at the festival into local downtown clubs to draw in visitors who might otherwise have been unfamiliar with those venues.

Parking and Access

When it comes to parking in downtown, the city faces challenges both of perception and reality. By the numbers, downtown Syracuse has enough parking space: In the 2004 Downtown Master Plan completed by SUNY-ESF, it was noted that nearly 60 percent of downtown property is devoted to the automobile, and a full 39 percent is dedicated entirely or partly to parking. A total of 22,000 off-street spaces are available downtown, including 12,900 garage spaces. And that doesn't even factor in available on-street parking.

Some argue that the problem is one of awareness and accessibility. In fact, much of this documented space is unavailable when people need parking. By law, parking garages are required to staff their facilities whenever they are open. As a result, many garages close overnight, when business is slow, leaving a large number of spaces both vacant and inaccessible. This creates a very real parking shortage for residents, workers and visitors.

One possible solution would be to develop a plan that would allow multiple users who experience peak demand at different times of the day (workers by day, residents or visitors by night, for instance) to share the same facilities. If the city is to attract the large numbers of residents needed to fuel a downtown revival, it must address the need for overnight, off-street parking that residents are going to face.

Another difficulty is the general lack of coordination among the various parking facilities throughout downtown. With no central parking authority to regulate, coordinate and supplement downtown parking facilities as is needed to encourage more visitors and new private investment, parking continues to be a "problem" downtown. The economics of private garage construction are unworkable without subsidy. Further, the various lots and garages set their own policies regarding access, fees, hours and signage, and residents, local businesses and visitors alike are understandably confused. Rightly or wrongly, many in the community see traffic and parking as barriers that complicate their access to downtown resources.

Those who know downtown well say there is no parking shortage; you just have to know where to look and be prepared to walk a block or two to your destination. But if people perceive there is a shortage, then that perception becomes the problem and must be addressed.

Other findings relating to parking and general access to downtown:

- **Design and maintenance standards are needed.**

In an evaluation of downtown parking lots conducted by TNT Sector 1 and reported in the SUNY-ESF Downtown Master Plan, facilities were scored on such criteria as appearance, functionality, security and other features. Only one of the total 125 surface lots received a 100 percent rating in this evaluation, and only 56 scored above 50 percent. A successful revitalization plan must address the need to set standards for appearance and maintenance of parking facilities.

Given the realities of our mobile culture, the availability of parking facilities is essential to successful revitalization, but poorly maintained or designed facilities can have a deadening effect on the sense of vitality and streetscape energy that urban planners strive to achieve. Parking garages constructed with nothing but concrete walls lining the street, and surface lots that break up block after block, are nothing but dead space to pedestrians. They remove the “eyes on the street” that shops or other first-floor commercial establishments

provide; dilute pedestrian traffic; and detract from the overall character of the streetscapes.

- **Public transit is an important resource for downtown employees, residents and visitors.**

The new CENTRO transportation center planned for the current Red Cross site on Warren Street, and the new Connective Corridor shuttle are promising steps. As part of a well-planned urban environment that minimizes the need for more parking lots and garages downtown, we need a coordinated transit policy to encourage a shift away from automobiles and encourage other transportation choices. The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) has an important role to play in advocating for and developing a unified transportation plan for the growing Hill, downtown and Lakefront area.

- **The Route 81-Almond Street corridor is an economic and logistical barrier.** This traffic corridor creates a significant and unsightly barrier between downtown and the economic engines on University Hill. It impedes connectivity, discourages pedestrian traffic, and makes it difficult for downtown to capitalize on the positive economic

The Seven Principles of Downtown Parking

- 1) **The proper role of parking.** Too often, downtown planners and business people put too much emphasis on parking. Nobody decides to go downtown because there are ample places to park... if parking is oversupplied, badly designed and/or poorly located, it can potentially decrease the demand for downtown activities by diminishing the collective sense of place that makes the downtown a desirable destination.
- 2) **Strategically locate parking.** Smarter locations include secondary streets with less pedestrian volume, behind the main street buildings, and on the edges of downtown. You can do a lot of damage by putting parking in the wrong location.
- 3) **Value on-street parking.** Many drivers prefer on-street parallel and angled parking. On-street parking is also very good for pedestrians, because it provides a buffer between moving traffic and the sidewalk.

- 4) **Emphasize quality design.** Nowhere is it written that parking lots and structures must look utilitarian. Blank walls should not be allowed anywhere downtown. Street-level shops in parking structures not only help to fight the blank wall syndrome, but have proven to add revenue for the facility as well.
- 5) **Make better use of existing spaces.** Downtowns that study use of their parking find that even during the perceived busiest times, there is parking available, but people may not know where it is. Shared parking, where multiple users that experience peak parking demand at different times (i.e. government offices and an entertainment district) can make use of the same facilities, avoiding wasteful duplication.
- 6) **Control the total volume of downtown parking.** Most cities apply traditional minimum off-street parking requirements to their downtown that usually are overstated. One consequence is increased parking coverage rates which spread out downtown destinations beyond walking distance and discouraging users

from walking on the sidewalks and passing by other downtown businesses. One way to control the supply of parking is to establish parking maximums, rather than minimums.

- 7) **Plan for parking comprehensively.** The goals that downtowns have — to have high density, to be compact and pedestrian friendly, to have a strong sense of place, to take advantage of historic and cultural features — all these things need to be supported by the planning for parking. There should be a comprehensive plan for downtown, where parking is one of the key ingredients.

The September 2005 issue of *Downtown Idea Exchange* carried this article titled “Principles of Smart Downtown Parking” by Kent Robertson, Ph.D. Here are Dr. Robertson’s seven principles.

You can read the full article at <http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/perspectives/dixarticle091505.pdf>

developments taking place at SU and the medical complexes. In a 2006 talk titled “Transforming Metropolitan Governance in Syracuse: A Roadmap for Prosperity,” Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution states, “(The city) should tear down the I-81 segment that divides Syracuse University and the medical centers from the central business district. It is an obsolete, anachronistic, and unnecessary highway, and it eventually will come down anyway. Why not now? Demolishing the highway and replacing it with a boulevard would not just open up a connective corridor to downtown. It would also send a strong signal that Syracuse is serious about competing in the 21st century economy, and that its leaders and citizens alike have the will, energy, and vision to reinvent the physical infrastructure of their community in a way that leverages its core assets.”

Within the next 10 years, the state will have to either make major, costly improvements to the existing highway or replace it with a boulevard and divert highway traffic around the city. Although a final decision is likely to be made at the state and federal levels, it will be influenced by public input. Every effort should be made this time to understand the economic and social consequences of the various alternatives to the current I-81 viaduct. The alternative that includes redirecting long distance travelers to I-481 and replacing the outmoded viaduct with a more efficient and attractive boulevard should receive highest priority.

- **Better signage is needed.** The city and county currently lack a universal signage system to clearly and distinctively identify gateways into the city; direct visitors to arts and cultural venues and other points of interest; and facilitate connections among the various downtown neighborhood pockets. A coordinated signage system would help to build a consistent identity for the metropolitan area and serve as a welcoming, visitor-friendly tool for those unfamiliar with our city.

Tourism

When it comes to tourism and convention business, Syracuse’s greatest assets are the friendliness of its residents and the city’s overall affordability. Its greatest deficits, according to local tourism officials, are the current lack of a convention center hotel and a lackluster downtown business district.

A healthy convention and tourism business can play a substantial role in reviving the city’s and the region’s economic fortunes. Currently, bookings at the OnCenter are good (900 events attracting one million visitors annually), but an increasing proportion of events are local, which are costly to set up and shorter in duration and which contribute less to the local economy since they largely recycle local dollars. A thriving convention business that brings out-of-area visitors to Syracuse not only raises the city’s profile as a potential vacation destination; it boosts the tourism industry throughout Central New York, from the Finger Lakes to Cooperstown. Conversely, when the city’s ability to attract convention business wanes, the entire region suffers.

How do cities successfully attract convention and tourism business? **A vibrant downtown center is crucial to these efforts.** A critical mass of restaurants, shopping, entertainment and services is essential, with high-quality shopping venues perhaps the most critical of all assets. Other assets that visitors/convention clients want:

- **Attractive streetscapes.** A clean, attractive environment throughout downtown is essential for creating positive and lasting impressions.
- **A feeling of safety.** Vibrant, lively, well-lit and pedestrian-friendly streets, combined with necessary public safety ordinances and enforcement, go a long way toward creating a perception of security.
- **Clearly marked signposts.** Visitor-friendly cities make sure that entry points and attractions are well marked.
- **Connective pathways.** Visitors want walkable, well-marked corridors from one downtown attraction to the next.

While the city’s ability to draw out-of-area visitors is critical, its appeal to suburban residents also is important, and in this area, Syracuse continues to suffer. Many suburban residents are unfamiliar with downtown’s resources and perceive the district as an unwelcoming place. Many believe that the city’s streets and parking facilities are unsafe to walk. Those who work in the tourism industry sometimes contribute to negative impressions themselves. Hotel clerks who don’t know the city and taxi drivers who speak disparagingly about it do nothing to bolster its appeal among visitors. Clearly, we have some work to do in our own back yard.

Characteristics of Successful Downtowns: Shared Attributes of Outstanding Small & Mid-sized Downtowns

Summary Findings

1. No single organizational model exists

- Contrary to expectations, there is no single way cities with great downtowns deliver their downtown services.
- Instead, these cities have found varying ways to provide needed services.
- Each model reflects the institutional strengths present in the community.

2. These downtowns tended to have multiple traffic generators that supplemented the presence of a larger institution(s), all within short walking distance.

- Many, but not all of these traffic generators were purposely strategically located.
- Serendipity had as much to do with some locations decisions as careful planning.

3. These great downtowns are beloved by citizenry.

- They have regional significance.
- There is strong affection for the downtown.
- There is also controversy and debate, but always strong affection.

4. These downtowns have been and are continuing to overcome challenges and obstacles.

- Just because the city has a great reputation for its downtown doesn't mean that it is exempt from challenge.
- These cities have found ways to meet their challenges.
- Even today, these cities are preparing for their next set of challenges.

- Every downtown faces continual challenges. The great ones respond.

5. These downtowns are walkable. They have pedestrian scale.

- There was no single model. They include pedestrian malls, linear main streets, public squares, and multi-zone downtowns.
- People expected and preferred to walk.
- There were numerous street level attractions to hold the attention of the pedestrian: architecture, storefronts, street amenities, art, and signs.

6. These downtowns, by and large, had a commitment to mixed use development.

- Uses are generally not geographically separated. When they are, they remain within walking distance of each other.
- New projects have mixed use orientations.

7. There is broad public/private investment in the future of downtown.

- These cities are planning for their futures.
- They are implementing new projects that broaden the appeal and scope of downtown.
- Many of these projects have public sector involvement.
- Cities tend to be pro-active in facilitating these projects.

8. The nature of downtown retailing appears to be in flux.

- Food & beverage is replacing traditional retail.
- Local, independent retailers continue to dominate most downtowns.
- These downtowns are facing increasing competition. Some have been exempt from serious competition for a number of years.

9. Entertainment is a driving market segment.

- Anchor projects help (movie theaters, performance halls, proximity to university facilities).
- All have been able to extend the life of downtown beyond 5:00 pm.
- All have strong and growing restaurant sectors.

10. There was a prevalence of strong, adjacent residential neighborhoods that are within walking distance of downtown.

- Many of these neighborhoods were upscale, with some of the higher priced housing in the city.
- This was not necessarily student housing.
- These neighborhoods provided a key base of patrons for downtown.

11. Downtown (CBD) housing was either prevalent or underway. The market for housing in downtown was strong and growing.

- Affordability was a major issue faced by many of the communities.
- Downtown residents were likewise invaluable to the downtown retail economy.

12. Universities help but are not the sole answer.

- Several cities reported low use of downtown by students (Northampton, Wooster, Charlottesville).
- One city had a small downtown despite a location abutting the campus (Chapel Hill).
- One city had no major university (Portland).

From research findings conducted by Gary Ferguson, Executive Director, Ithaca Downtown Partnership, for the Cornell University Civic Fellows Programs, September 2005

Recommendations

As a reflection of the character of the community, the economic and aesthetic condition of downtown is extremely important to the entire region's economic development efforts. Without policies and actions to prompt significant revival in our central city, it is doubtful whether the region can attract sufficient new business, investment and the young talent necessary to sustain itself, let alone grow, in the years ahead.

A Starting Point

"Revitalizing downtown will require strong leadership from the public and private sectors. City government must take the lead in developing a plan to achieve downtown redevelopment, one that recognizes the key importance of new residential projects, and the need to attract new high-tech and telecommunications ventures, while retaining and expanding the office, government, cultural, arts and entertainment facilities already here. ... (But) city government cannot do the whole thing on its own. Economic revitalization requires active involvement by the city's private sector, partnering with government, and a shared commitment to making things happen." — Syracuse 20/20 (2000)

Recommendations:

- Local government must embrace a vision for downtown as a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, community center, where many kinds of people live, learn, work and play. The city should adopt and then implement the Downtown Master Plan of the Syracuse Comprehensive plan by activating processes and mechanisms for achieving that vision.
- Ultimately, the future of the downtown is a regional issue that requires a regional solution. The Economic Development Leadership Team (composed of the mayor, the city council president, the county executive, the chair of the county legislature, and the leaders of the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Development Association) should formally identify the revitalization of downtown Syracuse as their top economic development priority and agree that the prospects for redevelopment of downtown will be greatly enhanced by a joint effort that begins with a consensus plan for the redevelopment of the core blocks, or heart, of downtown. The likelihood of a successful effort would improve with common goals and objectives and the combined economic development resources of city and county govern-

ment and of the MDA and the Chamber standing behind the initiative.

- The Central New York business community should reaffirm the significance of a populated and economically healthy downtown to the growth of the region by locating or doing business downtown whenever possible, supporting downtown events and cultural institutions, and advocating for and supporting public policies that strengthen downtown.
- Identifying or "branding" downtown as the civic and cultural heart of the region, Central New York's "next great neighborhood," and the traditional as well as "right-now" center of community significance will help residents from throughout the region regain civic pride, support downtown initiatives and promote Central New York as a thriving area.

Downtown Development and Housing

"In our view, the key to the new downtown is residential development. Full-time residents require and will support service retail development from groceries to hardware, and from restaurants to recreation. ... Our task is to provide an environment of leadership, finances, regulations, settings, plans, and infrastructure that allow the creative structures and interactions we seek to emerge." — Syracuse 20/20 (2000)

Recommendations:

- Community leaders should establish a specific goal of **\$1 billion in new private and institutional investment over the next 10 years and be prepared to make certain strategic public investments in support of that private and institutional investment.** Investment on this scale would largely reverse the declines experienced in the past several decades.
- Development of a variety of market-rate housing downtown must be a priority. Toward that end, the city must make a significant commitment to improving the downtown infrastructure to leverage the development of a substantial, and varied, number of new housing units suitable for young singles as well as empty nesters, retirees and older baby boomers. Over the next 10 years, we need 2,500 additional downtown residential units – including historic conversions and newly constructed townhouses, condominiums and apartments

- to accommodate 4,000 new residents, the critical mass necessary to begin spurring accompanying business and retail investment. This goal would represent an investment of about \$400 million (of the targeted \$1 billion) over the 10-year period. The community should spur the development of 2.5 million square feet of new and rehabilitated commercial/institutional space to attract new tax-paying commercial investment that could tap into the success of the Connective Corridor and other University Hill economic initiatives.
- The intellectual and cultural capital that the city and region derive from area educational and medical institutions is enormous. City and county officials, along with the Chamber of Commerce and Metropolitan Development Association, should take the lead in exploring new opportunities for mutually beneficial collaborations with SU, Le Moyne College, SUNY-ESF, and Onondaga Community College. In addition to the Connective Corridor project, leaders should look for additional ways to tap into the economic engine of University Hill, including innovative collaborations in downtown that address the growing space needs of SU, SUNY-ESF, Upstate and the VA Hospital. Such collaborations could spur about \$600 million (of the targeted \$1 billion) of investment in adjacent private commercial and mixed-use development over the next 10 years.
- We recommend a strategic public investment of \$40 million to enhance the public realm downtown and to leverage the earlier components of the billion dollar capital investment goal. This funding would be used to undertake infrastructure and public improvements (\$10 million, addressed in further detail in following section), to induce further residential development (\$10 million), and to fund acquisition and redevelopment of blighted properties, innovative parking solutions, and inducements for private development (\$20 million). These funds should be targeted in such a way that each dollar of public investment is tied to at least \$10 of new private or institutional investment. Sources for this public investment fund should include federal, state, county and city funds, including a portion of the Destiny settlement, and possibly corporate and foundation funding. We readily acknowledge that securing this level of funding will be a challenge, but the community has demonstrated the ability to attract such funding when the public policy arguments are sound and the factual circumstances are compelling. Past examples include the Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative (\$46 million), the Inner Harbor development (\$20 million) and the Connective Corridor (\$10 million)
- The steps being taken by City government to facilitate the process for reviewing and approving new

Downtown Housing: Something for Everyone

To be an interesting, vibrant and truly urban neighborhood, downtown needs a diversity of residents, a variety of housing types (e.g. high-rise apartments, lofts, condominiums, townhouses) and a mix of low, moderate, and upper-income housing units. While most of the new housing downtown involves market-rate units in small, renovated buildings, it's important to note that nearly half of the existing downtown housing is low- and moderate income rental housing.

The New York State Mitchell-Lama housing program — named for the state legislators who sponsored the legislation — was created in 1955 for the purpose of building affordable housing for middle-income residents. In exchange for low-interest mortgage loans and real property tax

exemptions, the law limited developers' profits, and placed income limits on tenants. Used in conjunction with federal loan guarantees and low interest loans, the Mitchell-Lama program was used to build several housing projects in Syracuse in the 1970's. Harrison House and Townsend Towers, both located in the Presidential Plaza area just west of I-81, are 20-story high rises each with 200 units of housing for low income tenants. An additional 305 high-rise units are located on the west side of downtown in Clinton Towers, at 550 Clinton Street. Although the three high-rises represent a total of 705 units, in reality, many of the apartments require substantial rehabilitation and are vacant. Under state legislation, the owner of the properties may withdraw from the program 20 years after the project was built, if the mortgage is prepaid.

Madison Towers, also in Presidential Plaza, was also built under the state program, but without federal subsidies. Madison Towers is a fully occupied moderate-income building of 232 rental units, including 16 townhouses. The rents, regulated by New York State, are market-rate for Syracuse, and the project houses many students and employees from nearby Syracuse University and Upstate Medical University institutions.

Policies and actions aimed at responding to current demand for downtown market-rate housing for new moderate and upper income residents do not negate the need to restore the units in high-rises in need of substantial rehabilitation. Drastic action by the state agencies with oversight responsibility for the projects is needed to revitalize the high-rise buildings.

development and eliminating discouraging delays should be continued and enhanced. An attitude that encourages and facilitates new development projects must be cultivated among employees in all relevant municipal departments.

- The value of urban planning must be recognized and given priority consideration by local governments. An office of city planning and urban design should be created and staffed with experienced professionals specifically charged with addressing the physical development of the city and particularly downtown. For such an office to be truly effective, the city must revise the Zoning Rules and Regulations, develop, adopt and enforce a Downtown Master Plan.
- Vigorously support enactment of a more effective New York State historic tax credit, similar to the 30 percent Rhode Island State Historic Tax Credit, in order to encourage developers to undertake otherwise economically unfeasible rehabilitation of historic buildings that give the downtown much of its unique character. Cities like Providence, R.I., and St. Louis, Mo., have used an effective state historic tax credit, combined with the existing federal historic tax credit program, with great success in transforming declining downtown centers.
- Encourage mixed-use development – housing, office and retail – throughout downtown, both within individual properties where possible and district-wide, in order to bring 24-hour life to downtown, reflecting the traditional diversity of functions and activities of the city center.
- The city must take a proactive policy dealing with disengaged owners of vacant and/or deteriorating properties by conducting regular inspections of downtown commercial properties and requiring owners to adhere to prevailing codes and standards. Strict code enforcement and judicious use of tax seizures and eminent domain are tools for reducing the problem of blighted properties that are in danger of deteriorating beyond repair, that stand in the way of new development, or that discourage development of adjacent properties.

Walkability/Streetscapes

“For residents and daily users, as well as uninitiated or infrequent visitors, traveling to and within downtown must be a high quality, memorable experience. Powerfully articulated corridors linking downtown to its larger context, and districts within downtown to

one another, will contribute to successful way-finding and a positive impression of the city core. Basic amenities, such as coordinated signage, lighting, street furnishings, vegetation and public art, can ensure pedestrians safe and pleasurable movement throughout downtown.” — The Downtown Master Plan of the City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan (SUNY-ESF, 2004)

Recommendations:

- Create interesting, comfortable walking routes – with lighting, shop windows, shade trees, informational and directional signage, cleared sidewalks and crosswalks – to encourage walking, increase the number of people on the sidewalks and in buildings looking out on the sidewalk, and improve the perception of safety and security in the downtown among visitors, workers and residents.
- Establish a comprehensive streetscape plan that sets design and maintenance standards for all elements in the public right of way. Develop clear, well-marked and well-maintained east-west corridors to adjoining key downtown neighborhoods, destinations and developments (e.g., the OnCenter complex to Everson Museum, Armory Square and Hanover Square,) in conjunction with the comprehensive streetscape plan.
- Provide the overall management structure and make the necessary investment of public funds (including city and county contributions and special assessment funds) to carry out streetscape improvements and maintenance, including the development of more visible green spaces to complement development of residential neighborhoods and provide attractive environments for downtown employees and visitors. A total of \$10 million, as noted in the previous section of recommendations, should be strategically invested in parks and public spaces, sidewalks, lighting, trees and landscaping, comprehensive welcoming and way-finding signage.
- Influence property owners and tenants to contribute to the beautification of downtown, and thereby protect their own investments, by caring for their properties, improving and cleaning facades, windows and sidewalks, and making sure storefronts are welcoming and lit at night.
- The county should budget \$5 million to continue enhancements to its downtown sites and budget sufficient additional funds to maintain these investments. All streetscape improvements should be coordinated with the comprehensive streetscape plan for downtown.

- Establish and enforce design guidelines that maximize the visual interest of buildings at street level and enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Completion of the downtown portion of the Creekwalk as a pedestrian pathway, as well as bicycle path, and the linkage from Franklin Square to Armory Square, should be a priority.
- Take steps to address negative perceptions regarding safety and security in the downtown held by many existing and potential visitors, workers and residents.

Marketing

“The importance of marketing a downtown cannot be overstated since a downtown marketing campaign can be used to raise the profile of downtown and the downtown enhancement effort; spotlight improvements and investments being realized in downtown; convey the important role a vibrant downtown plays in a community’s overall quality of life; build a constituency for downtown and the enhancement effort; generate excitement about downtown; improve a community’s self-image and pride; improve the ability to garner resources and support for the downtown effort; and stimulate downtown’s economy by attracting investors in the form of businesses, real estate purchasers and developers, consumers, tourists and residents. In fact, it would be difficult to find a downtown in this country that has been enhanced without the use of a marketing effort.” — Syracuse Downtown Action Agenda 2001 (Hyett Palma)

Recommendations:

- Working with one or more local public relations firms, the Economic Development Leadership Council should develop a high-quality marketing campaign concentrating on creating a sense of downtown as a place of excellence and a desirable destination. Building on the brand, or identity, established by the campaign, multifaceted marketing plans must be developed to target key audiences – businesses and site selectors, prospective residents and potential patrons of businesses and cultural organizations. Funding sources might include special assessment revenue, corporate and university donations and in-kind contributions, state grants, and Room Occupancy Tax and sales tax revenues.
- The city should hire a director of downtown development to focus on marketing and to lead the team effort to develop an identity to “brand” downtown and to recruit new retailers and office tenants, residents, business and convention visitors, customers and investors.
- The Downtown Committee website should serve as an updated, accurate, interactive and comprehensive clearinghouse for downtown news, event information, businesses, cultural and public facilities, and parking while providing easy links to related sites to help visitors find other specific information on downtown attractions, retailers, cultural institutions, hotels and restaurants. The Chamber’s Convention and Visitors Bureau should play a key role in developing and funding the site. The website marketing campaign should include an attractive, widely distributed, weekly e-newsletter to generate communitywide awareness and enthusiasm for downtown.

Parking and Access

“As long as metropolitan regions continue to pursue development at the fringe, downtown workers and visitors will rely on cars to bring them to and from the heart of a city. In recent years, it generally has been recognized that downtowns must accommodate cars, but not at the expense of all else. Identifiable approach routes, distinctive entry points, easily traveled primary streets and sufficient, well-coordinated parking are essential to the success of downtown Syracuse.”

— The Downtown Master Plan of the City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan (SUNY-ESF, 2004)

Recommendations:

- In order to holistically and effectively address parking in the downtown, one entity should hold sole responsibility for the oversight of all parking and must evaluate parking needs in a comprehensive way, addressing operations and management as well as design and maintenance. Adequate, safe and well-managed parking facilities for employees (by day), residents (by night) and visitors should be part of a comprehensive parking plan.
- A comprehensive signage system, including a directional system leading to downtown, should be implemented to clearly mark the city’s gateway entry points, information to attractions of interest, and parking facilities.
- At a minimum, design standards for parking facilities should require that 1) they be well marked and well maintained 2) surface lots be attractively screened from pedestrian traffic and 3) parking garages be designed with street level

Business Improvement Districts

In order to manage their core business and cultural areas, many cities have instituted business improvement districts (BIDs), a form of public-private partnership that provides a variety of services to benefit downtown property owners and businesses, to draw new businesses and visitors to downtown, and to create a vibrant community center. Enhanced maintenance (sidewalk cleaning, plantings & maintenance, graffiti removal), enhanced security (supplemental police and/or civilian foot and bicycle patrols) marketing (marketing campaigns, publications and websites, print and email communications), and development and operation of special events of all types, are the services typically provided by Improvement Districts. Economic development activities, from office and retail business recruitment and retention, to market research and developer and investor recruitment are also common responsibilities of a district. In some cases, a downtown BID covers only a portion of the downtown area. The special assessment district may be associated with another nonprofit development corporation that promotes downtown development initiatives on a broader scale. BIDs originated in Canada in the late 1960s and are now prevalent throughout the U.S. and other countries.

The Downtown Committee of Syracuse, Inc. administers the special assessment district created in 1975 through special State legislation and charged with the revitalization, promotion and management of downtown Syracuse. Funded primarily through a special assessment levied on all properties within its boundaries (690 on the north, Almond Street on the East, East Adams Street on the south and Onondaga Creek on the west), the Downtown Committee provides supplemental environmental maintenance and security services downtown, operates the Downtown Farmers' Market, produces the annual Syracuse Arts & Crafts Festival, works with property owners to market and develop downtown properties, and works with the City and other organizations on downtown events, marketing and promotions, and

economic development projects and issues related to downtown. The Downtown Committee of Syracuse is an affiliate of the Metropolitan Development Association, a private, not-for-profit development entity representing large corporations, businesses and institutions in Central New York. In 2005-2006, the Downtown Committee's budget totaled \$906,994; over three-quarters of the income, or \$742,608, is derived from the special assessment levied on downtown properties. The total special assessment is set annually by the city's Common Council, and levied proportionately among downtown properties based upon their property assessment, frontage, and location within the district. The Downtown Committee has a website, downtownsyracuse.com, which includes a directory of development opportunities and projects, as well as shopping, dining and events information.

As not-for-profit corporations, BIDs have by-laws and are governed by boards of directors. The functions of the organizations and composition of the boards vary, depending on the enabling legislation and bylaws. In Syracuse for instance, the board of 15 directors, of whom 11 must be property owners or their agents, is appointed by the mayor. Syracuse's was the first BID in New York State; other districts are governed by subsequent legislation.

Buffalo, Place, Inc. is the independent not-for-profit corporation that manages a 24-block area including the pedestrian mall surrounding the downtown core. The Buffalo Place board is structured so that property owners elect their representatives, and city, county, and transit authority officials and downtown tenants are represented. The organization focuses on marketing, maintenance, planning and advocacy. Only about 40% of its \$3.1 million budget comes from special assessment taxes on property owners; another 54% is generated by marketing and special events. The weekly Buffalo Place E-Report, buffaloplace.com/ereport, delivered to over 11,000 businesses, government officials residents and others, keeps constituents up-to-date on development and events downtown.

Cornell University and Ithaca College representatives are ex-officio members of the Ithaca Downtown Partnership, downtownithaca.com, founded in 1997. The Ithaca BID focuses on business development and retention, marketing and promotions as well as special events, and prepares an annual work plan, based on a 10-year strategy, that guides and directs the time and resources spent. About half the annual budget of \$500,000 comes from special assessments.

Downtown Albany, the BID created in 1996 to revitalize a 50-square block area, focuses on business retention and recruitment, visual improvements, and safety. The board of 20 members is a combination of elected property owner and tenants and appointees. The organization promotes downtown as a premier entertainment and dining district, and promotes business and residential development. The website, downtownalbany.org, features and interactive parking map, virtual tours of downtown, and results of market research studies.

Other cities have business improvement organizations of varying sizes and levels of activity. The Harrisburg Downtown Improvement District, known as Harrisburg Hello, harrisburghello.com, incorporated in 1999 to strengthen the area's competitive edge. The DID maintains a Downtown Visitor's Information Center, publishes print and electronic promotional materials and produces seasonal and holiday events. The Downtown St. Louis Community Improvement District, downtownstl.org, managed by the Downtown St. Louis Partnership, provides enhanced maintenance, security, marketing, streetscape improvements, landscaping, economic & housing development, special events and banners, business recruitment, retail development in a 165-block area. The Partnership's Downtown Guides Team are distinctively uniformed sidewalk greeters who travel on foot and bicycles to provide information to visitors and workers, and also serve as "additional eyes and ears" for downtown security officers and maintenance teams.

shops or display windows in order to avoid blank walls that make buildings look forbidding and discourage pedestrian traffic.

- Tax valuation of surface parking lots should be reassessed to reflect their market value as income-producing properties and to ensure they are paying a fair share of property tax. Undervaluation of land used for parking creates disincentives to redevelopment of those centrally located parcels and ultimately discourages creation of a stronger tax base.
- Additional transit options should be explored to serve downtown residents, workers and visitors. Dedicated routes and service, such as the Connective Corridor and OnTrack, can provide attractive alternatives for coming to and from the city core. Creative strategies such as user-friendly public transit technology and signage, bike lanes and storage, and improved pedestrian links to adjacent neighborhoods could promote walking and transit use as alternatives, and limit the need for more cars and parking areas downtown.
- The University Hill transportation study currently underway by the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Committee should serve as a template for a similar transit study and plan for the whole of downtown.
- Redesign of the Route 81-Almond Street corridor could enhance the visual and physical connections between downtown and the Hill. The forthcoming transportation study to determine the future of the I-81 viaduct is an opportunity to change the nature of these important connections, as well as to increase the potential economic benefits of both areas. Moreover, a redesigned corridor has the potential to bolster the national image of the Syracuse metropolitan area and strengthen the regional economy.

Arts, Culture and Public Events

“It is downtown that contains the greatest concentration of monumental places that literally and figuratively embody a community’s collective cultural heritage. It is here that one finds the great examples of architecture, civic art and public spaces; grand movie palaces, imposing museums and eclectic art galleries; and homes of the symphony, opera and performance theater. Their close physical proximity to one another invites joint or complementary events, programs and exhibits, which in turn unleash a creative energy throughout the city center. Downtown Syracuse contains such a rich concentration of cul-

tural organizations and facilities – a prestigious assemblage that should be enhanced and expanded.”
— The Downtown Master Plan of the City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan (SUNY-ESF, 2004)

Recommendations:

- Given the importance of downtown cultural institutions to regional tourism, the community needs to increase arts funding through creation of an arts fund from a dedicated revenue source. The Room Occupancy Tax generated by hotel room rentals and collected by the county is one such possible source.
- The City should establish a full-time position of Public Arts Coordinator to coordinate a public arts program for downtown, serve on the Cultural District Commission to advance the development of a downtown Cultural District, and work in conjunction with the Connective Corridor project and individual institutions to help build a stronger cultural identity for downtown.
- Create a Public Arts ordinance that establishes a process for installing both temporary and permanent public art projects throughout the city, including downtown.
- The county, city, Downtown Committee and private donors should establish a foundation to fund a public art program to place a significant work of art (statue, sculpture, mural, etc.) as well as temporary art installations in prominent downtown locations each year. Such major works of public art will further enhance streetscapes, create pedestrian appeal, and shape the character and image of the entire community.
- Downtown festivals can help foster a sense of identity and “place” and build an awareness of downtown as a vibrant, all-season cultural center. But Downtown Committee officials, business owners and festival organizers must work together to find ways of encouraging festival visitors to patronize downtown businesses.
- The architecture of downtown is an underappreciated asset and attraction. Architectural lighting already installed within downtown has highlighted the beautiful architecture of the M&T Bank building, the National Grid building, the Loew’s building and others. Property owners should be encouraged to invest in similar building lighting projects. The city or Downtown Committee should explore the possibility of assistance for such an initiative.

Implementation

Instituting these public-policy adjustments and achieving the 10-year goal will require a well thought out year-by-year implementation plan. We believe the Economic Development Leadership Team is well situated to marshal the resources at their collective disposal to collaborate on executing a plan they jointly develop.

Next Steps:

1. The Economic Development Leadership Team should immediately concur that *at this time the focus must be on downtown*, ratify these recommendations and agree to jointly spearhead the effort.
2. Speaking in unison, the Economic Development Leadership Team should engage the key leadership of the University Hill institutions in a series of collaboration conversations to flesh out the opportunities – near term, mid-term and years into the future.
3. The Economic Development Leadership Team should host a series of conversations with private-sector interests – developers, owners, tenants and residents – to identify additional collaborative opportunities to invest in and grow the community, and with the public and arts and not-for-profit interests to identify still more opportunities to invest in and grow the community.
4. The opportunities that come out of these sessions need to be clearly understood – what is achievable now and into the future, what impediments stand in the way, and how private, public, institutional and not-for-profit leaders can collaborate to get good things accomplished.
5. The process requires trained professional staff in municipal departments working with the stakeholders to put together a thoughtful urban design and development plan that advances projects that meet private, institutional, public and community objectives.
6. With a plan in hand, the Economic Development Leadership Team needs to team these immediately achievable opportunities with the public resources and investments necessary to commence the effort.
7. Even as these first opportunities are launched, the Economic Development Leadership Team should focus on what happens next. The goal is to establish positive momentum that can sustain us – the downtown, the city and the region – well into the future.

To sustain momentum and to build community appreciation of downtown and awareness of new initiatives, we invite the Economic Development Leadership Team to report on its progress at the first annual Downtown Summit in fall 2007.

Conclusion

The city of Syracuse is at a crossroads. Over the last several decades the downtown, like so many other urban centers throughout the country, has languished as suburbs have boomed. But the tide is turning as people of all ages are taking another look at downtown living and liking the possibilities that they see. And where residents go, business and retail will follow.

But we must take action now. If we are to capitalize on our substantial assets and ensure the long-term success of downtown, our city and county governments, business and community leaders must make downtown revitalization an absolute priority. While the city has the most immediately at stake, the county and region clearly have a tremendous investment in the success of downtown Syracuse as well, and the responsibility for action must be acknowledged and shared by all.

It will require an infusion of both public and private capital, a comprehensive strategy that builds on our substantial strengths, and the political will to work together – city and county, public and private – toward a larger, shared vision. It will require creative minds and a willingness to take the city in new directions in order to accomplish that vision. The momentum is already building as city leaders, educational institutions, visionary developers and businesspeople, and community groups like 40-Below have begun to engage together in efforts to jump-start a revitalization process.

We want a city that inspires pride throughout Central New York. We want a city that serves the region as a center for commerce, culture and community life. And, perhaps most importantly, we want a city that offers our greatest asset – our young people – the promise of a successful future here in Central New York. No more studies or fact-finding forums. We can do this. We know how. Our own consultants and other cities have shown the way. We must now take action to accomplish the task.

Appendices and Resources (see yesu.syr.edu/ocl)

Study Session Notes

- Study Session #1: Armory Square: Lessons from the Rebirth
- Study Session #2: Downtown Living Forum
- Study Session #3: Downtown Office Market Trends
- Study Session #4: Downtown Study Committee Tourism Panel
- Study Session #5: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC)
- Study Session #6: Downtown Housing Panel
- Study Session #7: Eds & Meds: Downtown Synergies
- Study Session #8: Downtown Retail Panel
- Study Session #9: Franklin Square
- Study Session #10: Cultural Districts
- Study Session #11: Downtown Economic Trends
- Study Session #12: Impact of Artists and Culture Downtown
- Study Session #13: Impact of Festivals Downtown

Presentations

- “The Arts and Economic Development: Paducah Artist Relocation Program”
- “Observations on Revitalizing Downtown Syracuse”
- “Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council”
- “University Hill Transportation Study”
- “Transforming Metropolitan Governance in Syracuse: A Roadmap for Prosperity”
- “Tax Base Trends”
- “Charting a Course for Downtown Living”

Studies and Reports

- HyettPalma 2001 Action Plan
- HyettPalma Downtown Syracuse Action Agenda 1996
- Downtown Committee of Syracuse – Annual Reports
- Characteristics of Successful Downtowns
- Cultural Districts and Syracuse
- Onondaga County’s “New Urbanism” Settlement Plan
- Syracuse Comprehensive Plan
- Syracuse Comprehensive Plan Components
- Who Lives Downtown? (Brookings Institution)
- Parking & Circulation (from ESF Spring 2004)
- Comprehensive Parking Strategy (from ESF Spring 2006)
- Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Missouri

Governing.com articles

Previous OCL Studies

- 1979 *Equality and Fairness in Property Assessment* – Co-chairs: John Searles, Margaret Charters
- 1980 *Young People in Trouble: Can Our Services be Organized and Delivered More Effectively?* – Co-chairs: Jean Reeve, Roberta Schofield
- 1981 *The County Legislature: Its Function, Size and Structure* – Co-chairs: Helen Zych, Elma Boyko
- 1982 *Declining School Enrollments: Opportunities for Cooperative Adaptations* – Chair: Margaret Charters
- 1983 *Onondaga County Public Works Infrastructure: Status, Funding and Responsibilities* – Chair: Samuel P. Clemence
- 1984 *Police Services in Onondaga County: A Review and Recommendations* – Chair: John Kramer
- 1985 *The City and County Charters: Time for Revision?* – Chair: Thomas J. Maroney
- 1986-87 *Blueprints for the Future: Recommendations for the Year 2000* – Co-chair: Robert McAuliffe, Eleanor Shopiro, Helen Anderson
- 1988 *The Role of the Food Industry in the Economy of Onondaga County* – Chair: Kay Benedict
- 1989 *Poverty and its Social Costs: Are There Long-term Solutions?* – Co-chairs: Darlene D. Kerr, Marilyn Higgins
- 1990 *Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare?* – Co-chairs: James J. Murphy, Anne L. Messenger, Patrick A. Mannion
- 1991 *Schools that Work: Models in Education that Can be Used in Onondaga County* – Co-chairs: Georgette Cowans, Gary Grossman, Gerald Grant
- 1992 *Town and Village Governments: Opportunities for Cost-effective Changes* – Co-chairs: Carol Dwyer, N. Thomas Letham, Helen Zych
- 1993 *The Criminal Justice System in Onondaga County: How Well is it Working?* – Co-chairs: M. Catherine Richardson, James E. Introne, N. Thomas Letham
- 1994 *The Delivery of Human Services: Opportunities for Improvement* – Co-chairs: Robert McAuliffe, Janet Starr, Phillip Trainor
- 1995 *Reinvesting in the Community: Opportunities for Economic Development* – Co-chairs: Marcene S. Sonneborn, Michael J. Atkins, Donald MacLaughlin
- 1996 *Building a Non-Violent Community: Successful Strategies for Youth* – Co-chairs: Paula Freedman, Carol Cowles, Jesse Dowdell
- 1997 *Security Check: Public Perceptions of Safety and Security* – Co-chairs: Michael Freedman, Corinthia Emanuel
- 1998 *Onondaga County School Systems: Challenges, Goals, and Visions for the Future* – Co-chairs: Patricia Schmidt, Bethaida Gonzalez
- 1999 *Economic Development: Models for Success* – Co-chairs: Shiu-Kai Chin, Susan Crossett, N. Thomas Letham
- 2000 *Housing and Neighborhoods: Tools for Change* – Co-chairs: John McCrea, Joanne Reddick, Russell Andrews
- 2001 *Civic Leadership for Community Transformation* – Co-chairs: Melissa Hall, Judith Mower
- 2002 *State of the Arts* – Chair: Fred Fiske
- 2003 *Mental Health Services: Access, Availability and Responsiveness* – Chair: Helen B. “Jinx” Crouch
- 2004 *Disappearing Democracy? A Report on Political Participation in Onondaga County* – Chair: Steven Kulick
- 2005 *Strategic Government Consolidation* – Chair: Laurence Bousquet
- 2006 *“Leveraging Better Outcomes for Downtown”* – Co-chairs: Joseph Ash, Jr., Douglas Sutherland

Our Mission

The Onondaga Citizens League fosters informed public discourse by identifying and studying critical community issues affecting Central New York, developing recommendations for action, and communicating study findings to interested and affected groups.

